

THE ARGOSY.

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THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

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CHAPTER IX.

CHELSON.

THE shadow of changes was coming over Seaford. Mr. Coomes fell ill, and died; and Mr. Halliwell was only performing the duty in the interregnum that occurred between the appointing of another incumbent. Alfred had been very well liked during the time that he had filled the office of curate at Seaford, and the parishioners were in hopes that whoever was appointed to the living would keep him on. Failing anything better, he would have been glad of it himself, but an influential man, a friend of the late Major Halliwell's, had promised to interest himself in a certain quarter, and try and obtain for him an incumbency.

Hester was outgrowing her sorrow; but it was a work of time. Her dreams, and perhaps her waking thoughts, would sometimes present confused images of a muddy river, into which a desperate man had leaped and sunk. The random words of the Swiss governess induced this. The Seafords, after the second winter there, left the castle, and went abroad, and no tidings whatever had been heard of George Archer.

In spite of Hester's silence, and absence of all allusion to the subject, Mrs. Halliwell saw that a change of scene would be beneficial to her, and she sent her to spend this summer at Middlebury with Mr. and Mrs. Halliwell: many a pleasant month had Hester spent there in her youth. She did not return until September, and the first news that greeted her was that Alfred was appointed to a living in Chelson, and had just departed for it. It was but a poor appointment. The living was set down as worth £170 per annum, but the net income scarcely realised £140. Alfred sent them word that Chelson was a pretty place, and its inhabitants showed him much kindness and hospitality.

Again the winter went on, and the spring, monotonously enough.

An Indian letter, now and then, from Mrs. Pepper, and a flying visit from Aunt Copp, were the only variations. Mrs. Halliwell, Hester and Lucy were alone, Mary being then at a finishing school. The new Vicar, Mr. Williams, was a young man, and they became very intimate with his wife.

One day in the late spring, Mrs. Halliwell, who was reading a letter just received from Alfred, appeared to fall into a reverie, now musing, now referring to the letter.

"What are you puzzled about, mamma?" asked Lucy.

"I am not puzzled, child, but I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"That it is unkind of us, as Alfred says, to suffer him to be there so long alone."

"When Alfred left, you promised him that you would go yourself, mamma," returned Lucy.

"Ay," she answered, in a somewhat curious tone, "I did say so, but I must visit by deputy. Children, I think you must have noticed that I am breaking fast."

"Breaking, mamma!" almost merrily exclaimed Lucy; "you are only two or three and fifty. People don't break till they are seventy."

"Painful disorders—and incurable—come on at all ages, Lucy."

"But you have none," was Lucy's answer. "You look as well as ever, and your colour is as bright." Hester, however, sat in awe-struck silence, looking at her mother.

"My dears," said Mrs. Halliwell, "I am not well. I have known it some time."

Hester rose and approached her mother. "Dearest mamma," she said, in low tones, which she compelled to calmness, "if you have reason to suspect that anything is the matter with you, let us know it. What," she added, in a quicker tone, as a recollection suddenly came over her, "what did Mr. Davis want here yesterday? Was it only a call? I thought it was."

"I sent privately for him, Hester," returned Mrs. Halliwell.

"Oh, mamma!" interrupted Lucy, bursting into tears, for she was very excitable, "tell us what it is."

"If you will not be foolish, I will tell you. Indeed it is nothing to be alarmed at. I may live many years. Hester, you are looking frightened also. I did not mean to alarm you, only to give you a reason for my not going out visiting. I suppose I have introduced my subject too abruptly."

"Mamma," said Hester, but very quietly, "you are keeping us in suspense."

"Children, I have heart complaint. I have long thought that this fluttering which comes on, and this difficulty of breathing, with other symptoms, must have something to do with the heart. I sent yesterday for Mr. Davis, and he confirms my opinion."

"There are many sorts of heart disease," breathed Hester. "Which——"

"He called it dilatation of the heart," interrupted Mrs. Halliwell, "combined with another long word which I really cannot remember. Hyper—something—it began."

"Did Mr. Davis say there was any danger?"

"No immediate danger whatever. I may live, as I told you, many years. It will, however, no doubt, be my death at last."

In spite of her self-control, Hester burst into tears. "Oh, mother! you have taken away all the happiness that was left to me."

"Hester! do not speak like that. See how calm I am. My dear children, if we are to be thus afflicted at the mention of death, how shall we be fit to meet it when it comes? Have you both profited so little by your childhood's hymn?"

"What hymn?" sobbed Lucy.

"Teach me to live that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed."

"My darling children, until we acquire this peace within us, it is impossible that we can be happy. I trust it is mine: let that console you. In time I pray that it may be yours."

"What did Mr. Davis say?" asked Hester.

"He only confirmed my own suspicions, and detailed the nature of the disease. I must live an absolutely quiet life, very abstemious and regular; and for other remedies that may be requisite, he will order them, as occasion shall arise. There was no reason, he assured me, why I should not make an old woman yet, provided I took care of myself. But now you see," she added, smiling, "why I may not go galloping over the country to pay visits, as you young ones may."

"Mamma," said Hester, "if you could get yourself removed quietly, by easy stages, to Chelson, the change might benefit you."

"No, my dear, it would be sure to do me harm, let me travel as quietly as I would. My going from home is out of the question; so it must be one of you. Now which shall it be?"

"Lucy, of course," observed Hester.

"Hester, not me," said Lucy. "I would not leave you, mamma."

They had both spoken at once, and a friendly dispute ensued. Neither would leave Mrs. Halliwell; and she sat and laughed at them. The knowledge of her state did not seem to affect her spirits in the least. "I think you must let me decide," she interposed at length.

"You had better, mamma. If one of us must really go."

"Then I say Hester," rejoined Mrs. Halliwell. "Alfred is so incapable of anything like domestic management, that I daresay his house and its affairs—what is the French word for it, Lucy? we have no good one—have never been set going, in proper order, yet. And,

as Hester excels in these things, and you do not, Lucy, she had better go."

Thus it was decided. And the last week in May Hester quitted Seaford for Chelson.

There was no rail to the place in those days, only three stage coaches, and she started by the early one. The glistening dew was still on the fields, the birds were singing, the hedge flowers opening, and the various points of the landscape, as they drove on, stood out, clear and lovely, against the morning sky. Her fellow passengers were two pleasant, elderly ladies, who pressed egg sandwiches upon her. She asked if they knew Chelson. Yes, they answered, they lived within a few miles of it: it was a pretty place, containing a good many Dissenters.

"There are two churches," Hester eagerly observed: "St. Stephen's and St. Paul's."

"But they have been so badly managed that a great many have seceded from them to become Dissenters," one of the ladies replied. "There's some rare fun going on at Chelson just now, though; as we heard a few days ago in a letter."

"What is it?" inquired Hester.

"They have a new clergyman at one of the churches, I forget which, and the ladies are turning his head with attention and flattery. It is a hot pursuit with them; Chelson has not been so lively for years. It is sure to be the case where there is a bachelor clergyman."

Hester wondered whether they could be speaking of Alfred. But she thought not: he had too much steady good sense for anything of this sort.

At four o'clock she reached Chelson, and was surprised to find no one waiting for her at the coach-office. A porter took charge of her luggage, and showed her the way to the vicarage. The church, an old grey building, covered with moss, lay very low, a descent of several steps led to the churchyard, and the vicarage was contiguous to it, the long dank grass touching the walls of the house. The porter halted his truck at the steps, and shouldered one of the boxes, whilst Hester went down them, crossed the churchyard, and knocked at the vicarage door.

"If this house is not damp," began Hester to herself, but stopped in surprise, for at least a dozen heads appeared at one of the windows, peeping at her. She thought the porter had made a mistake.

"Are you sure this is St. Stephen's Vicarage? The Reverend Alfred Halliwell's?" she hastily asked.

"Oh, quite sure, miss," he replied, smiling at her idea of his being mistaken; and probably following the bent of her thoughts, for he added: "I think the new Vicar have got his sewing-party to-day."

"Sewing-party!" uttered Hester.

"The ladies meets at his house once a week, miss, and makes clothes for the poor."

The door was flung open by a middle-aged woman in black, with spectacles on her nose, and grey hair sticking out. Mr. Halliwell appeared behind her. And then Hester found there had been a mistake, either in her mother's wording of her letter, or in his reading of it, for he had not expected her till the evening coach at nine o'clock.

The luggage was put in the passage, a very narrow one, and then Mr. Halliwell introduced her to the parlour. Fifteen or sixteen ladies, of various ages, up to five-and-thirty, sat round a table, which was piled up with calico, flannel and coloured prints. "My eldest sister," said he. "Mrs. Zink, Miss Dewisson, Miss ——"

Hester heard no more. She thought she should have been smothered. The whole bevy started up, and fell upon her. She had a great dislike to being kissed, but what was she to do? Mrs. Zink, a stout lady, rising fifty, the wife of a professional man in Chelson, was the only married lady present. She offered to chaperone Hester upstairs, and Alfred thanked her.

It was a poor, old-fashioned house, containing five rooms besides the kitchen, which was built at the back. The ceilings were miserably low: Hester could touch the beams with her hand. There were two parlours, one on either side the door; two bedrooms over, Mr. Halliwell's, and the one meant for Hester; and one room above, in what Hester would have called the roof, but which she there heard styled the "cock-loft."

"What a number of bonnets!" exclaimed Hester, when she came in view of her bed.

"My dear Miss Halliwell, I hope you will excuse it," said Mrs. Zink—it struck Hester as being the oddest name she had ever heard. "We have been in the habit of putting our things here, on the Tuesday afternoons, and although the room was made ready for you, we did the same to-day. Indeed there was no other place. The second parlour has the tea laid out in it, and of course the young ladies would rather be skinned than invade the privacy of the Vicar's bedroom. Did you wonder at seeing so many here, all at work?"

"A little, at first," answered Hester.

"Ah! your dear brother has had the labour of a horse before him. The parish was in the most neglected state when he came to it; religion and morality were not thought of amongst the poor, and the children were a race of heathens. What Mr. Halliwell would have done without us, I don't know. We have organised everything for him: schools and book-clubs, and district-visiting ladies, and coal-and-provident meetings, and sewing-for-the-poor societies, and all else requisite, so that he really has no trouble, except his Sunday duties."

"But—pardon me—if the lady-parishioners are so very kind as to

accomplish this good, of themselves, why could they not have done it in the time of the last Vicar, or at least have prevented things from getting as you describe?"

"My dear Miss Halliwell, there must be a head: your brother has to be referred to on all occasions. In any little doubt or difficulty we fly to him, and indeed we never like to hold a meeting unless he is present. Now, Mr. Clarke, the last Vicar (a very good old soul, in the abstract), was as deaf as a post and a martyr to rheumatism. There would have been no satisfaction in working for him. For the last five years of his life he had to be dragged into church by Betty and the beadle, and did all the duty from the reading-desk."

"Is my brother liked here?" Hester ventured to inquire.

"Liked! he is adored," returned Mrs. Zink. "And the greatest pleasure we enjoy is looking after his domestic comforts. He seems to have as much notion of home-management as the curate at the other church has of preaching."

"He was always deficient in that sort of usefulness," remarked Hester. "I think clergymen frequently are."

"Ah, poor things!" aspirated Mrs. Zink; "these inexperienced saints of clergymen are like doves, pecked at by every raven that comes near them, in the shape of tradespeople and servants. And they fall into snares so unsuspectingly! Would you believe that your brother was actually going to retain the late Vicar's female servant?"

"Indeed," answered Hester, not quite knowing what she might be expected to say.

"To be sure she is no beauty, and she is turned five-and-forty," went on Mrs. Zink. "It is Betty, the woman who opened the door for you, the sexton's sister. He could not understand why she would not do for him, as she had done for the late Vicar. But I, and Mrs. Farley, and Mrs. Dewisson, and Mrs. Hook, and a few more, stepped privately up here, and pointed out to Mr. Halliwell that there was a wide difference between old Clarke, going on for eighty and no teeth, and a handsome young man like himself. There certainly *might* not have been any scandal talked in the parish, and I shall never forget the unsuspecting young Vicar's astonished looks at our hinting that it was possible; but we told him that it was better to steer wide and clear, and give it a distant berth. So, until now, nobody has lived in the house with him but the sexton's son Jim, an extremely handy young man of one-and-twenty."

"Then has my brother no maid-servant?" inquired Hester, wondering where Mrs. Zink's communications would end.

"He has taken her on now, in expectation of your arrival: she came in yesterday. A sight of dirt, she has just told me, she found to clean up in the house, especially in Jim's bedroom in the cock-loft."

"I fear it must have been rather awkward, both for my brother and the young man, to contrive for themselves without a woman-ser-

vant," said Hester, not agreeing in the least with the nonsense Mrs. Zink had been talking.

"We have all been proud to do what we could for our dear pastor. When he is dining at home we send him in some little dainty—a custard pudding, or a plate of macaroni, or some raspberry cream—for Jim's skill in cooking only extends to chops and potatoes. But it is but rarely he puts Jim's cooking to the test; he is constantly invited out, to one parishioner's or another; they quarrel who shall have him. I secured him for the Sunday," added Mrs. Zink triumphantly. "I knew how it would be, the instant I set eyes on him—that every soul would be wanting to snap him up. So I made hay while the sun shone, and engaged him for every Sunday in the year, all the fifty-two, for dinner and tea. Now, Fanny! what do you want?"

A pleasant-looking girl had entered, humming a tune. She was Mrs. Zink in miniature, very garrulous and positive.

"Tea is ready, mamma; and Mr. Halliwell says will you come and make it?"

Mrs. Zink turned to Hester. "We are having tea early, but it refreshes us. Shall I preside for you this evening, or would you prefer——"

"Oh, if you please, I would much rather you did it," interrupted Hester. "They are all strange to me."

"Then I'll go on. Fanny, have you finished that pinafore?"

"No, mamma," answered Fanny, with a gesture of impatience. "I have turned it over to Matilda; she will do that and her own work too."

"The most easy job I could find, all straight sewing, and you give it up!" cried Mrs. Zink, angrily. "I don't know what is to become of you, Fanny. It is a blessing that Matilda is domesticated and industrious."

"Is she, though?" ejaculated Miss Fanny Zink, in a whisper, nodding her head after her mother, as the latter went downstairs. "Do you like plain sewing, Miss Halliwell?"

"I like it very well," was Hester's reply, "and often have a good deal to do."

"Well, I would as soon be put in the pillory. Mamma brings me here, on the Tuesday afternoons, and I enjoy coming, myself, for the fun of it, but I don't do a stitch more than I can avoid. I call it a most detestable mania that they have got up, since the new Vicar came."

"If you so much dislike work, you should leave it for those who are fond of it," smiled Hester.

"None of them are. It's all put on. And if it were not for—something—they would not do any. Look at Matilda: she would not touch a needle at home, if she were paid, though she does come here, and sit, nose to knees, for hours, without stirring. I can't, so it's of no use pretending."

Hester had made herself ready by this time, and they went down to the parlour. Not the one where the sewing was. A very handsome tea was set out, Mrs. Zink presiding. The cups and saucers were blue and gold, and a small fringed damask napkin was on each plate. Bread-and-butter, rolls, biscuits, watercress, radishes, marmalade, potted tongue, damson cheese, and a pint jug of cream. Hester saw it with astonishment: if her brother had thought to provide the one half of this, his housekeeping talents must have wonderfully improved.

What they seemed to want most was room. And how the chairs for eighteen were stowed into that little parlour must ever be a mystery. Not many could sit round the table; the rest put their chairs where they could, face to face, or back to back, as they would go in, and held their plates on their laps. When Betty or Jim came in with fresh supplies of hot water, it was taken from them at the door, for there was no getting inside. Jim seemed to enjoy the party as much as anyone; there was a good-humoured laugh on his face, which never left it. He was a simple-minded young man, very anxious to please, and in bodily fear of his aunt, Betty. But to see the attentions lavished by the ladies upon their minister! "Mr. Halliwell, let me give you a little marmalade. I know it is good, for I made it with my own hands." "Oh, Mr. Halliwell, allow me to spread it for you." "Dear Mr. Halliwell, do taste the potted tongue! Now I superintended it myself, and there's just the flavour of spice you like." "Mr. Halliwell, I am peeling this radish for you, and you must eat it. I will answer for their being fresh, for I pulled them out of our own garden." "Just look, Mr. Halliwell, what a beautiful piece of damson cheese! I have cut it for you. Mamma prides herself upon her damson cheese, and I always assist with it." "My dear, good Mr. Halliwell, I beg your pardon! I did not perceive your cup was empty. Permit me to pass it." And this kept on all tea-time, so that by the time it was over, the Reverend Alfred Halliwell, who was naturally diffident, had a face as red as the radishes.

They turned to the sewing again afterwards, and left about half-past eight o'clock, he going with them. Hester then went into the kitchen, and asked Betty for a candle, thinking she would have a look round her brother's bedroom, and see if things were comfortable for him.

"My goodness!" she uttered, when she found herself there. She had never witnessed such a room: the state it was in would have turned her mother crazy. Mrs. Halliwell used to reproach Alfred with never keeping his drawers straight: she should have seen these, inside and out.

"Ah, miss, you may well stare," said Betty, who had followed. "When I first see this room yesterday, I heaved up my hands and eyes. And when I spoke to master about it, he looked round as if he see it then for the first time. But he did say that he never could"

find his things when he wanted them. Wouldn't I like to have the shaking of that Jim !”

“My brother never does see anything but his books and pens,” said Hester. “What are all these rolled up here ?”

“Clean shirts which have got the buttons off,” responded Betty. “It have been master's plan, I hear, when he have put on a shirt and found a button gone, to tug it off again and cram it, anyways, into the drawers, or toss it on the top, so that I b'lieve he have not got above a couple of shirts to wear. As if that Jim could not have folded them up after him ; and sewed the buttons on too, if he liked, the proud monkey ! Them are stockings, miss, and they have no fellows that I can see, and there ain't one in the whole stock but have nine or ten holes in it as big as half-a-crown.”

“They will never mend !” exclaimed Hester, looking at stocking after stocking in dismay.

“Not to much account,” answered Betty. “Mr. Jim ought to be made to pay for new ones. He might have bought some darning-cotton and a needle, and caught up the holes, not have let 'em go on to this. I took a pair down yesterday, after master went out to dinner at five, and when he come home at half after ten I hadn't got through the first. And oh, miss, you should have seen Jim's room in the cock-loft. He had been a cutting up of wood in it, and never cleared up the chips, and drops of taller was splashed on the boards, and a hole burnt in one corner of the sheet. I'd put Master Jim in a press-gang for two months and make him work, if I had my will.”

“Where did this come from ?” inquired Hester, espying a handsome white satin pin-cushion on the dressing-table. “And what pretty scent bottles !”

“They come from one or another of 'em,” replied Betty. “I daresay Jim knows which. It have been as good as a theatre-play to him.”

“From one or another of what ?” repeated Hester, not understanding.

“From the young ladies what's after master. The house is full of their presents. You just wait till to-morrow morning, miss, you'll see something then. Why, miss, there ain't one of that sixteen what was here to-night but is ready to rush into his arms, whether he'll open them or not. All them niceties you saw on the table for tea was brought here by one or t'other : pretending, to master, that they had made the jams and things themselves, that he might get thinking what a useful wife they'd make him. The cups and saucers was lent by Mrs. Zink—she's a deep one, she is—and them fringed cloths on the plates was give by Mrs. Dove. When they first got up these sewing-parties they held 'em at their own houses, by turns. And what made 'em propose to hold 'em at the vicarage ? Why, because master should be present, for that's all they care for, not for the sewing or the poor ; and they couldn't for shame ask him to a

stitching-meeting. The mothers be more cunning than the daughters, and that's a fact. I wonder master ain't druv clean off his head with the two. Here comes master! he is soon home to-night."

Hester quitted the room with Betty, leaving it as it was until morning. "Where do you sleep?" she inquired.

"Up there, miss, in the cock-loft."

"I thought that was Jim's room."

"Jim left when I came in, miss. He is to come, of a day, to fetch and carry messages. The notes master has to send the ladies, in answer to their'n, is enough to exercise Jim's legs."

When Hester made her appearance in the parlour the following morning, she wondered what in the world had come to it. The back of every chair was decorated off with a white netted covering. And not only the chairs, but the ends of the little sofa, and also the two stools, which were not of common horsehair, like the rest of the furniture, but elegant pieces of embroidery in floss silks. She had never met with these white things before; they have become universal since, but her opinion is that Chelson gave rise to the fashion, for she saw none anywhere else for years afterwards.

"I knew you would be dazed, miss," cried Betty in triumph. "I had got 'em in the wash-tub yesterday. They was pretty black when I came, for this room smokes like anything, and I sat up to dry and finish 'em after you went to bed."

"What do you call them? What are they for?" asked Hester, pleased with the novel sight.

"Well, miss, they ain't of no use, they are for ornament; they gets tumbled, and they gets on the floor, and the cotton fluff from 'em gets on to the gentlemen's clothes. I calls 'em chair-sacks, but that ain't the quality name. There's a set for master's bedroom, which haven't been put on yet; and Jim did hear, miss," added Betty, dropping her voice to a mysterious whisper, "that the ladies was a consulting whether they might not do some to put on the pulpit cushions."

Hester was admiring them still, for they gave a light, pretty appearance to the low, dark room and its plain furniture, when her brother entered. "How gay you are, Alfred!" she said.

"Gay! Oh, with these anti-macassars. A senseless name for them, insinuating that we all use hair-oil."

"Who made them?"

"Miss—let me see—Miss Dewisson, I think it was, made this set."

"Betty says there are some for your bedroom."

"Yes. Emma Farley made those. You had better put them in yours. I have not used them."

"And who worked you these foot-stools, Alfred?"

"Oh, that was a joint-stock affair, I believe. Five or six joined, and presented them."

The vicarage was inundated that day with callers, so that its inmates could hardly snatch their early dinner. The visits were

ostensibly to Hester, but she thought they were really meant for Alfred. One of them, Miss Butler, who came with her aunt, left a thin parcel of tissue paper in Mr. Halliwell's hands, expressing a hope that he would find the contents useful. He opened it as soon as she was gone.

"Look here, Hester! Do you think I can wear these?"

It was a pair of fine bands, hem-stitched and trimmed round with a sort of lace, very narrow, the work of the hand.

"Of course you cannot wear them," was Hester's astonished reply. "I never heard of any bands but plain ones being worn. What possesses all the ladies you have come amongst?"

Mr. Halliwell laughed. "I never met with so good-natured a set as these Chelson people. Hester, I do think I might wear these; I do not like to appear ungrateful."

"You cannot wear the bands," peremptorily returned Hester. "Don't talk nonsense. I wish my mother could have come here instead of me."

"Why so?"

"Because, Alfred, you are running into danger, and need warning counsel. When a parcel of women can beset a clergyman, because he happens to be unmarried, as these Chelson people are besetting you, my opinion is that they possess neither judgment nor modesty. And I am sure they have no religion."

"Hester, I strive to do right—to adhere to the line of duty."

"I believe you wish to do so, Alfred. But they are rendering it difficult."

On the following Sunday morning, as Hester was passing upstairs to get ready for church, her brother's door stood open, and she espied these identical bands laid out on his dressing-table, side by side with a pair of plain ones. Hester felt grievously vexed, for it convinced her he was debating with himself whether he should wear them. She darted in, seized them on the spur of the moment, flew quietly down the stairs, popped them into Betty's kitchen fire, and flew back again. Presently he came up and went into his chamber: he had been preparing the bread for the Sacrament, for it was the first Sunday in June.

"Hester," he called out, "have you taken those bands of Miss Butler's?"

"I taken them!" she answered, frightened to death; "what should bring me with them? It is more than half-past ten, Alfred. Make haste."

"Did you think the wind was very high this morning?" he presently asked again.

Hester sat down to laugh, and thought she should have choked. He imagined they had blown out at the window. "Oh, very high," responded Hester, when she could speak. "Don't you see the poplars blowing about?"

Mr. Halliwell said no more, and they went to church, he of course in the plain bands. The church was very full: in the late Vicar's time the pews had used to be empty: but (to go to no less legitimate considerations) Alfred Halliwell was a superior reader, and preached practical, excellent sermons. Hester was surprised to see so many young ladies remain for the Sacrament. Nearly every one in the church stayed, and it struck her that she had never before seen so many juvenile communicants.

But when she drew near the table and saw what was on it, her heart stood still and a film gathered before her eyes. There were a couple of lace handkerchiefs, one over the chalice, the other over the plate that contained the bread, or the alms just collected, she was not sure which. Her brother might *call* them napkins of fair white linen, but they were neither more nor less than worked handkerchiefs: the middle of silky, transparent cambric, and the border, four inches broad, of exquisite lace-work.

Those pieces of lace-work struck upon Hester's heart as being essentially wrong: not in themselves, but as applied to such a purpose. It was impossible not to have the eye diverted by the beauty of the embroidery; it was next to impossible to keep the mind from reverting to the unworthy motives which had induced the labour and the present to the young bachelor clergyman.

"Who worked—*those*?" she asked as they were walking home across the churchyard.

"Augusta Dove." He knew at once to what she alluded. "That young lady in blue, two pews to the left of you."

"Alfred, it is wrong; they ought not to be displayed there."

"I thought so at first. But the ladies were so pertinacious over it, persuading me there could be no possible harm in an innocent piece of industry. So I yielded."

"I wonder where this will end?" sighed Hester. "It seems to me that you run, blindfold, to meet them half way."

The Reverend Mr. Halliwell remained silent. Perhaps his conscience smote him. Or he may have felt that he had irrevocably fallen into the meshes of the Chelson maids and matrons, and was powerless to extricate himself.

CHAPTER X.

MISS ZINK'S HYSTERICS.

THERE seemed to Hester to be no end of work in the parish; much more than there need have been, to bring forth so little result. A treat was in agitation for the Sunday school children, and a dozen meetings were held to consult about it, Mr. Halliwell in the chair, and the ladies round. Meanwhile, he and Hester were invited to a grand evening party at Mrs. Zink's. But when the evening came Hester had to go alone, for he was called out to a sick parishioner.

They were up in arms when she entered by herself—the whole room. Oh, where was Mr. Halliwell? What was the matter? Was Mr. Halliwell not coming?

"Who is it that has sent for him?" inquired Mrs. Zink, when Hester explained.

"Sally Davis, I think Jim said," she answered.

"There! that old creature is always being taken ill!" uttered Mrs. Zink. "Do you remember, at the Jones's party in the Christmas week, when we were all so comfortable, dancing a quiet quadrille on the carpet, a message came from Sally Davis that she feared she should not live till morning, and dear Mr. Halliwell was forced to go to Back Lane, through all the cold, in his thin shoes? She is never contented but when she is having prayers read to her. They ought to put her in the workhouse."

"I hope my brother will never feel his duties irksome," Hester ventured to observe; "and I think he will not."

Just then a young gentleman swung into the room with a discontented air, and dropped into a vacant chair next to Hester. "I say," he whispered to her, "is not this precious slow?"

"Do you think so?" she politely replied.

"What has taken the parson, that he is not here yet? Do you know?"

"Mr. Halliwell has been called out to someone who is ill," said Hester. "He may not be able to come at all."

"My! you don't mean that! Won't they be savage! That serves ma right, for not letting me go boating. Because some of us fellows upset a skiff the other day, and got a ducking, she swore I should never go near the water again. We had made up a jolly rowing party for this evening, and when I was stealing off to it, she pounced upon me in the hall, and we had a regular quarrel. I told her I would go, so she laid hold of me, and hallooed out for the governor, who came out of the office and put in his word, and they made me dress and come in here."

"Are you Master Zink?"

"I am Mister Zink, if you please," returned the young gentleman.

"When a fellow's going on for seventeen, I should think that's old enough to be Mister. I say, though, isn't it a game about the parson? They have been mad over this blow-out: trying on dresses, figuring off before the glass, practising songs: all for him. And now he doesn't show. By Jove! if it's not good! There's more fuss made with that parson than with all Chelson."

"Who is that?" inquired Hester, thinking it might be well to turn the conversation, and directing his attention to a quiet-looking girl in lilac muslin.

"That! That's Mab."

"Who, sir?"

"Mabel Zink, my sister. The missis" (Mister Zink's familiar

name for his mother) "keeps her in the background, till Mat and Fan are got off. I say, how old should you think Mat is?"

"I heard your mamma say that Miss Zink was turned twenty."

"And a jolly long turn, too. She was twenty-seven last birthday, and Fan's going on for twenty-five. Why, Mabel's twenty!"

"But don't you think we might talk about something else?" interposed Hester. "Your sisters may not like to have their ages discussed."

"They can lump it. Mat and Fan magged out as loud as the missis against my going boating, but I said if they made me come in here I'd spoil sport. They fight and scratch each other after the new parson: metaphorically, you know, but they'd like to do it in earnest, if it could be kept from his ears. The missis favours Matilda, because she's the eldest, and it is her turn to go off first, but he may have the pick of the two, I can tell you."

"Are you fond of singing?" questioned Hester, hoping that might divert the young gentleman.

"Yes, I am, over the left," retorted Mister Zink. "I get rather too much of it for that. Mat and Fan are squalling against time from morning till night, since they found out the parson had a voice. I told them to-day that if they thought to hook him by noise, they might find themselves in the wrong box, for which I had to make a bolt. I wish he had never come near the place, I do."

"I am sorry he should be so unfortunate as to have displeased you."

"It is so nagging, you see," proceeded Mister Zink. "A fellow was left free as a hare before, but deuce a bit of that now. One halloos out, 'Tray, go and change those dirty boots: Mr. Halliwell's coming to tea.' Then the other screams, 'Tray, for goodness' sake go and make yourself decent! what an object you are! your head's like a mop! we expect Mr. Halliwell.' Last night we had a sharp dispute over it. I wanted Tom Fisher in: they said rude chaps like Tom Fisher were not society for the parson, and wouldn't let him come. So I walked myself out, and never came in till half-past eleven, and got a rowing from the missis and the governor. And one dare not leave as much as a flea in the drawing-room. I put a fishing-rod in the corner the other day, and they squealed after me as if it had been a serpent: 'Now, Tray, don't bring these things here! we can't have this room made into a litter; Mr. Halliwell may be calling.' I thought a parson was a peaceable man. I should be ashamed, if I were one, to cause the rumpus in a house that he does in this."

"But, really," urged Hester, "it appears to me that the 'rumpus' is not his fault."

"Well, I know I'm sick of it, and I wish he would marry one of the girls, and put a stop to the humbugging. I shouldn't care whether it was one of my sisters or anybody else's—though precious

glad I should be for those two eldest to cut it, out of here. Shall you try for him, now you are come?"

He put the question so quaintly, in a joke, as Hester supposed, that she could not forbear laughing.

"If you don't, you'll be an exception to everybody here. I'm sick of the idiots. I think Mab's making up to him, on the sly. And I suppose Amy would if she had the chance."

"Who is Amy?" questioned Hester.

"She's next to Fan, between her and Mabel. She lives at my old aunt's, and never comes to Chelson. The governor's aunt, you know; as cranky an old creature as ever was known. I wonder Amy can put up with her; but she ought to give thanks to be out of here, just now. There's the same row going on in the other houses over the parson that there is in this. Have you not twigged it at Mother Farley's?"

"I have not been to Mrs. Farley's yet," answered Hester.

"Not been—— Why, who do you mean to say you are, if you are not living there? Arn't you the little Farleys' new governess?"

"No, I am Mr. Halliwell's sister: staying at the vicarage."

"Oh, my eye!" exclaimed the young gentleman with emphasis, as he stared at Hester with a blank look of amazement. "Well, I have put my foot in it! I'll make myself scarce. Not that I care, ma'am, if you do tell the parson," he added, coming back again after springing from his seat. "The missis and the girls will believe me, for another time, that when I say I'll spoil sport, I mean to do it."

He crossed the room to his sister Mabel, telling her, no doubt, of his awkward mistake, for her face turned crimson as she glanced at Hester. Presently he commenced to drag her across the room towards Hester.

"Now, Tracy! now Mabel!" exclaimed Mrs. Zink, "what are you about?"

For answer, Master Tracy pushed his sister into the chair he had vacated by Hester, and in the bustle of this, Mr. Halliwell came in. He was rapturously received, and requested to "sit here," and "sit there," but he drew a chair near to his sister and Mabel.

"How is it you never come to the working parties?" he asked of the latter.

She blushed so prettily that she quite won Hester's heart. Indeed she seemed to do nothing else but blush, and glanced at Mr. Halliwell with her shy eyes. "Mamma thinks Matilda and Fanny enough to go—that I should only be in the way. And perhaps she is right, for I do not like work."

"You are very different from everyone else in Chelson," remarked Mr. Halliwell. "They like nothing so well."

"I like fancy-work," said Mabel.

"And music?" asked Hester.

"Oh, yes, and music. I like that better than anything. I wanted to make acquaintance with you before, Miss Halliwell, but they

would not give me the opportunity. I wish you would invite me to spend an evening all alone with you at the vicarage. Mamma and my sisters will never bring me of their own accord."

"Come to-morrow evening," interrupted Mr. Halliwell.

"Oh, if I might!" she uttered, clasping her hands with the prettiest expression of helplessness. "If you could but get leave for me, Miss Halliwell."

Music was introduced after tea. Nearly everyone in the room sang, except Hester and Mabel. Hester could not, and Mabel was not asked. When Hester requested permission for her to visit them the following evening, Mrs. Zink seemed inclined to substitute Matilda, but Hester pressed for Mabel.

Accordingly, the next afternoon, Mabel went to the vicarage. Hester was really charmed with her, she thought her a very nice girl, of simple, winning manners. They persuaded her to sing, though they had no instrument, and Hester was astonished at her voice. It was of rare quality, and had been well trained.

"The school treat is arranged at last," remarked Mr. Halliwell, in the course of the evening. "It is to be next Monday, in Clebbery Ground. The children will enjoy themselves in the open air so much more than in the confined schoolroom. Clebbery——"

"Do not tell me about it," interrupted Mabel, in an earnest, almost an impassioned tone. "It will only make me long to go."

"But you will go, will you not?" said Mr. Halliwell.

Mabel shook her head. "I am not allowed to go out with Matilda and Fanny. It is hard to be put aside for them always, and I feel it." She raised her charming blue eyes to his for one moment as she spoke, and when they dropped, their eyelashes were glistening with tears.

At eight o'clock a servant arrived for Miss Mabel. When she was ready the Vicar said he would walk with her.

"Oh, no, indeed, thank you, Mr. Halliwell," she returned, colouring crimson; "pray do not think of taking *me*."

"Why not?" he inquired.

"If it were anyone but me—of course—but they will say I have no right to monopolise your time or to give you trouble."

He laughed, and drew her arm through his, and Hester watched them across the churchyard, the maid following.

The next Monday rose delightfully, and amidst the many faces assembled in the schoolroom ready for the departure to Clebbery Ground (a rural spot at a convenient distance from Chelson, much used for pic-nics) Hester saw that of Mabel Zink.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Halliwell!" she whispered; "it is all owing to your message that I am here. Mr. Halliwell gave it to mamma, so she could not do otherwise than let me come."

Hester did not remember to have sent any message; but she thought it very kind of Alfred to beg for Mabel.

The younger children went in a large covered waggon with the provisions; the elder walked. As did all the visitors, a great number of them. They arrived there about twelve, amused themselves for an hour or two, and then had dinner. Afterwards they dispersed, some to one part of the grounds, some to another. Mrs. Zink took her station in a grotto, and went to sleep; Hester sat on the felled stump of a tree outside it, her memory wandering back to bygone years, years that for her never would return. Suddenly they were both startled: Mrs. Zink out of her sleep, and Hester out of her waking dreams, for Miss Zink came flying up in a state of excitement, darted into the grotto, sank down on the seat by her mother, and went into screaming hysterics.

"What in the name of fortune is it?" uttered the alarmed Mrs. Zink. "What has come to you, Matilda?"

The young lady made no answer, but shrieked and kicked so violently, that Mrs. Zink seized her by the head, and Hester caught hold of her feet.

"Have you been stung by anything?" asked the wondering Mrs. Zink.

"Yes, that's it," screamed Matilda.

"Whereabouts? Was it a wasp?"

"It was a man," shrieked Matilda.

"A man! Good patience, Matilda! Whatever can you mean?"

"A man and a sister," persisted Miss Zink. "Oh, the wickedness! oh, the treachery!"

"Has Fanny done anything?"

"Fanny! I wish it had been. It is that sly, smooth Mabel. I told you not to let her come. I went into that opening by the beeches, and there" (shriek!) "I caught them together, making love." (Shriek, shriek!). "He was kissing her" (shriek, shriek, shriek!) "he was, mother, as true as we are here!" (Shriek, shriek, shriek, shriek!)

"I'll lock Mabel up, my dear, as soon as we get her home. Who was kissing her? Mr. Spriggs?"

"Not *that* stupid Simon! he never kisses anybody. It was Mr. Halliwell. Somebody ought to write to his bishop."

Mrs. Zink screamed in echo of her daughter, and Hester was so petrified that she let go Miss Zink's feet.

"I never heard of anything so demoralising as for a parson to kiss," sobbed Miss Matilda. "I wonder where he learnt it? Not in the Commandments. He had got his arm round her, and his face glued to hers. Emma Farley and Augusta Dove saw it as well. Of course he will never attempt to face us from the pulpit again! He must buy a mask."

"I don't believe it," cried Mrs. Zink, who had been collecting her scattered senses. "You must have seen double, Matilda."

"We saw single enough," replied the young lady, roughly. "After everything we have done for him! run and reviled ourselves to death

over disgusting parish business—contaminated our fingers, sewing for those grubs of charity children—had him to our house at all hours and all meals—learnt new songs for him—worn new dresses for him—and to be served in this treacherous way! to be despised and deserted for that little wretch of a Mabel!”

With the last words Miss Zink recommenced the dance of her legs. Hester thought she would leave the grotto, and was gliding from it when she saw her brother approaching, with Mabel on his arm.

“Hester,” he sang out, “do you happen to know where Mrs. Zink is?”

“She is here.”

“Don’t come in!” screamed Matilda, as they drew near the entrance; “don’t contaminate us with your presence. Oh, you false—thieves!”

Hester was not sufficiently collected to note all that passed; but she heard her brother say that Mabel had promised to be his wife, provided her parents had no objection. It was Miss Matilda, he intimated, who had caused him to speak so soon; otherwise he should have chosen another time and place.

To describe the discomfiture of the pic-nic party when the news spread would be a task. Could they have shaken their Vicar in a bag, it might have relieved their feelings in a measure; but to shake Mabel to the bottom of the sea and leave her there would have relieved them more effectually. Mrs. Zink alone was composed: when her disappointment about Matilda went off, she subsided into a quiet glow of triumph. She *had* secured him: if not for one daughter, for another.

A Mrs. Rice came up to Hester, and spoke in a confidential tone. “It is the most unsuitable wife your brother could have chosen; and I am not actuated by *their* motives, Miss Halliwell, in saying so, for my girls are under ten. Mabel Zink ought to marry a rich man, who could keep her in idleness, for she is an incapable do-nothing, and she will never be anything else. He had better have taken Matilda.”

“Mabel is young,” rejoined Hester.

“Quite old enough to have distanced the others in the race,” quoth Mrs. Rice, significantly. “She laid her plans deeper than any of them, and she has won.”

“Mabel Zink never strove to win Alfred!” uttered Hester.

“So you may think,” answered Mrs. Rice. “I have seen a good deal, living, as I do, next door to the Zinks, and always running in and out. Mabel was kept back by her mother, but she put herself forward. She would steal an interview with your brother in the hall and chatter to him; she would meet him out of doors; in fact, they were always meeting, and she would put on her pretended shy, attractive, modest ways. I heard her invite herself to your house that evening, and saw through it. Not a young lady in Chelson has laboured more assiduously to catch him than has Mabel Zink.”

The words troubled Hester greatly, but she only remarked that she hoped Mabel would make a good wife.

"Not in the prudent sense of the word," observed Mrs. Rice. "Mabel can spend money, but she has no idea of saving it by domestic management. Why, she could not iron a pocket-handkerchief; or scarcely hem one. And she will have no fortune: it is well known that the old lawyer lives up to his income, some say beyond it. Rely upon it, this is the worst day's work she and your brother ever did. To fix on each other is to prepare for struggles and poverty."

A curious recollection darted into Hester's mind then—of the life of struggle promised to them all by her Aunt Copp. She felt very sad, and an impulse she could not restrain urged her to speak to Mabel, who happened to draw near as Mrs. Rice walked away.

"My dear Mabel," she began, "I fear you and my brother ought not to think of marrying, at least yet. Do you know how very small his living is?"

"Two or three hundred a year."

"Two or three hundred a year!" echoed Hester. "Where can you have received so false an estimate of his income? They call it one hundred and seventy pounds, but there are outgoing, and it does not bring him in more than one hundred and fifty pounds, if so much."

"Oh, that's lots," cried Mabel. "A hundred and fifty! It is more than we can spend. And there's the house as well."

"You do not know the value and uses of money. You——"

"Yes, I do," interrupted Mabel. "Mamma always allows me fifteen pounds a year for my clothes, and I have to eke it out by all sorts of contrivances."

"Dear Mabel, there are expenses in a married life which you little foresee or think of, and they come on very soon. Pray believe that I am full of love, both to you and Alfred, when I suggest that you should reconsider matters, and look to consequences."

"It will be quite fun to economise. I shall like it. As good as our gipsy party here to-day. You know we had to drink out of each other's glasses."

"No, Mabel, it will not be fun. You will find that you have plunged yourselves into difficulty and trial."

The nearest approach to a pout or frown that Hester had seen on Mabel Zink's face appeared then. "You are dissatisfied with me, Miss Halliwell; you wish he had chosen Emma Farley, or Mary Hook, or perhaps Matilda! You detest me for winning him, and you don't like me at all."

"My dear Mabel," said Hester, vexed to be so misconstrued, "the very fact of my speaking thus to you proves that I like and esteem you; otherwise my remonstrance would have been made to Alfred. I only ask you to reflect, to deliberate, and I urge it for your sake

rather than for his ; for in a home of poverty the daily crosses and privations fall more heavily upon the wife than the husband."

"There's nothing to deliberate upon," was Mabel's impatient answer as she escaped from Hester. "Mr. Halliwell's living is plenty to begin upon, and he is sure to get a better one in time."

"Good-night, Miss Halliwell," said Mrs. Hook to Hester as they gained the town on their return and halted at that lady's door. "A pleasant day we have had. Excuse me," she continued, lowering her voice to a whisper, "but if ever there was a Tom Noodle in this world—and he must forgive my saying it—it is your brother, for being taken in by that sly cat of a Mabel Zink."

"I wish you a good-evening, ma'am," stiffly said Mrs. Dewisson, when they came in turn to her door, while her daughter offered Hester only one finger to shake ; "present my compliments to your brother, and say I wish him joy of his bargain. And I wish Miss Matilda well through her disappointment, for she had set her whole heart and mind upon him. I hope she will not get brain fever."

"The same to you," was the cool reply, when Hester afterwards stopped to say good-night to Mrs. Farley. "If everyone was of my mind, Miss Halliwell, they would bring a general action against your brother for breach of promise, and I shall not hesitate to-morrow to avow my opinion publicly. What business had he to accept all the presents and the anti-macassars, if he knew he had got his eye on that deceitful, die-away Mabel Zink? It would be dishonourable conduct in any man, but it is positive dishonesty in a clergyman."

Hester reached home, glad to be there, and her heart was sore in many ways. Before dinner-time the following day, notes had arrived from three-and-twenty ladies, begging to resign all future aid or participation in parish business. In drawing the ink towards him to write the answers, Mr. Halliwell spilled some over one of the white netted chair coverings. "It is nothing," said he, in his dreamy way.

"Put this into cold water, Betty," exclaimed Hester, running with it into the kitchen. And Betty hastened to take it from her, as anxious about it as she was.

"You must be careful of these, Alfred," Hester observed, returning to the parlour ; "you will get no more of them, or of anything else."

"No," he answered. But there was a quiet smile on his face, as if he had been more awake to the by-play carried on than Hester had given him credit for.

"No, indeed," she repeated. "When a clergyman makes known to his congregation that he has chosen a wife, let him rest assured he will be troubled with no more anti-macassars."

Mrs. Zink hurried on the wedding, and settled it to take place in August. But Hester did not wait for it ; she returned home.

(To be continued.)

ANIMAL DISGUISE AND DEFENCE.

IN nature the struggle for existence is very marked and universal. The species of animals which increase and multiply owe, in great measure, their persistence to their power of cunningly adapting themselves to the circumstances in which they are placed, and of affecting disguises and expedients of many kinds.

The weaker and less adaptive ones go to the wall, and more or less gradually die out. The strong are those which, either consciously or unconsciously, develop imitations or employ devices of concealment, ruses of many kinds to mislead and deceive their enemies. In some cases this lies in colour, in tint so exactly resembling the ground they haunt or the vegetation among which they rest, that they are hardly to be detected by the eye unless in motion.

Some insects in repose exactly resemble a dried leaf on a tree ; others a little stump of dried wood attached to a branch. Birds conform to the colour of the herbage amongst which they nestle. The partridge is precisely of the hues of the ditch bottoms of the fields ; and even the pheasant, with its more brilliant markings, is not easily followed by the eye amid the undergrowth of ferns and brushwood. The plumage of the snipe is so like that of the brown marshes it loves, that it is scarcely possible to detect it till it rises. This tendency of the wild animals has nowadays received a definite name due to Mr. Darwin, and is called "Conforming to Environment."

It is even more noticeable in the eggs and nests of certain species of birds than in the plumage of the birds themselves.

The wild duck's eggs, for example, are of the tint of the reeds or water-flags where it has its nest ; those of the lapwing so closely resemble the ploughed land on which it lays them that one may walk along a field and pass a dozen nests or more without having noticed any of them. The short-lived little wren invariably adapts her nest to the colour and appearance of the surrounding foliage, or whatever else may be near to the cosy, comfortable nest she builds.

"In a beech tree near the house," writes Mr. St. John, "on which the leaves of last year still remain at the time when the birds commence building, the wrens form the outside of their nest entirely of withered leaves of the beech, so that, large as it is, the passer-by would never take it for more than a chance collection of leaves heaped together ; and though the nest is as firm and strong as possible, they manage to give it the look of a confused mass of leaves, instead of a round and compact ball, which it is."

The chaffinch builds usually in apple-trees, and so nearly imitates the lichen-covered branches by covering her nest with lichen, that few would detect it—a fact which, no doubt, goes far to account for the large

number of chaffinches to be found everywhere in the country—the ruse succeeding admirably against bird-nesting youngsters, notwithstanding the close proximity of the nest in most cases to human dwellings.

These devices are, of course, most common with the birds that nest on the ground, or build in low-lying shrubs or in hedgerows; those, on the other hand, that build in lofty trees do not have the same need to resort to such devices, finding in mere elevation a protection from most of their enemies.

The birds whose eggs are easily distinguished by their colour, generally take care to cover them neatly with leaves or feathers when they rise from the nest. The birds which build what are called domed nests, indeed—only another form in which the protective instinct expresses itself—usually have light-coloured eggs. The wood-pigeon builds high, but in the darkest part of the wood it can find, and to this protection it occasionally trusts too much, and is sometimes so careless with its nest—only a few twigs laid over each other crossways—that the shine of its eggs can be seen through in little slanting seams of white.

To some extent, though not perhaps to the same extent as in the case of birds, this is also true of quadrupeds.

The hare, which does not have the protection of burrowing that the rabbit has, conforms its colour so exactly to the dead leaves and herbage among which it couches that it would more often escape its enemies were it not for its extreme timidity, which makes it start and run when nearly approached. Several of our well-known quadrupeds are privileged to put on winter dresses—the most striking perhaps of the protective habits belonging to them—and of these we shall speak later on.

Perhaps in the whole realm of nature there is not a more remarkable illustration of some phases of the protective instinct than is to be found in that strange creature, the night-jar, eve-churr, dorr-hawk, or goat-sucker, for it bears many names. In some parts of the country it is regarded as a monstrosity—a kind of deformed or abnormally-developed hawk, and it is accordingly shot down or hunted mercilessly by the farmers and rustics, who have indeed surrounded it with no end of superstitions.

There is not a little, it must be confessed, in its appearance and in its peculiar habits to justify this. Its mouth is carried far back and is wide, and on the upper part of the beak it is armed with a drooping row of peculiar spike-like appendages or bristles (really quills or undeveloped feathers).

It has no beak to speak of, and when seen in the front face it looks, with its bright, wide-open eyes, like some eerie elfin thing, more especially if perched on the branch of a tree or brooding on what passes for its nest below on the bare ground. Its stretch of wing is remarkable for the size of its body, and its flight is very silent,

due to the presence of soft downy swathes on the breast, under the wings and over the legs, so that only the toes are visible. And its toes—particularly the middle toe—are unlike those of any other bird. The middle toe is furnished with a kind of comb-like flange or fringe, about the true purpose of which naturalists have had many theories but have come to no agreement.

The whole aspect of the creature is *outré*. It is a bird of the twilight or eve, rather than of the night, and is exceedingly shy and secluded. Owing to the peculiarities in the formation of its feet, it always perches along a branch, not across it as other birds do. This does much to aid its concealment, the plumage being a mixture of moorland tints—the ash grey, brown and yellow of furze, firs and ferns, with dim blotchings here and there like the russet of fading leaves. It is easy to be seen how truly protective this colouring is.

In the woods which it frequents, if you go and sit in certain places in the twilight, you will be sure to see it circling round the tops of the trees—it likes fir trees—hence its name in some parts, of the wheel-bird; and you will be sure to hear its peculiar harsh, monotonous *chu r-r-r*, like a telegraph instrument, as has been well said, beating out its message, as it silently wings its way, with wide gape, ready to seize the moths and other insects of evening, in which it is much helped by a kind of glutinous secretion with which it covers the greater part of its mouth, and the spike-like bristles or quills, on which the insects are, so to speak, glued as soon as they touch.

If it comes close to you and notices you, it is not unlikely that, by suddenly striking its wings together in some way special to itself over its back, you will hear one of the most ghostly sounds, and cease to wonder at the superstitious dislike entertained towards it by the rustics.

Instead, however, of being an enemy to the farmer and forester, it is one of their greatest friends; for it destroys both the insects and the larvæ of many insects which are very destructive to some plants and the woods of some trees—heavy beetles and, more especially, the cockchafer.

It makes no nest, but lays its eggs in a slight depression on the bare ground, in the sand, or on the dry grass and twigs at the foot of the tree on which it perches; the eggs—invariably two—being of a colour so like to that on which they are placed, that they are not easily recognised. They are pearly-white at base, with leaden streaks, and mottlings of brown and umber—the very colour of the vegetation of the heathy and waste ground it favours. One may go past them over and over again, and even tread on them without having seen them.

The bird's devices to decoy any intruder from its nest are something wonderful. It will flutter and circle, and run as if on the tips of its long wings along the ground, will feign to have wounded itself, and

in some cases, for a short time lie still as though dead till you advance near to it, and then it is off again as if half helpless with broken wing. Very probably it will succeed in its devices, unless you are a very expert observer indeed, or if it has not frightened you, for it will, as if by conscious mimicry, assume its most hawk-like aspect, and brush right against your face, as if it knew that thus it might repel when other means had failed.

When sitting on the eggs, the bird has the power of assuming the appearance of a rude stump; and, as its eyes alone would, by their clearness, destroy the illusion, it is very careful to close or almost close them when anyone comes near—an instinct which the young, from the very egg even, seem to share.

Whence come these wonderful instincts—this special knowledge so well fitted to secure the existence of this creature, so much exposed as it would seem in other ways? No one can tell; but in it the protective resources which are found in the lapwings and other birds are developed to the full, though from its greater rarity, its seclusion and its nocturnal habits, there are comparatively few who have observed them.

Thoreau, the great American naturalist, had his own special experiences to record with regard to the American species, known as the night-hawk. In his diary, under date June 7, we find him writing:—

“Visited my night-hawk on her nest. Could hardly believe my eyes when I stood within seven feet and beheld her sitting on her eggs, her head towards me: she looked so saturnian, so one with the earth, so sphinx-like, a relic of the reign of Saturn which Jupiter did not destroy, a riddle that might well cause a man to go dash his head against a stone. It was not an actual living creature, far less a winged creature of the air, but a figure in stone or bronze, a fanciful production of art like the gryphon or phoenix. In fact, with its breast towards me, and owing to its colour or size, no bill perceptible, it looked like the end of a brand, such as are common in a clearing—its breast mottled or alternately waved with dark brown and grey, its flat, greyish, weatherbeaten crown, its eyes nearly closed, purposely, lest those bright beads should betray it, with the stony cunning of the sphinx. A fanciful work in bronze to ornament a mantel. It was enough to fill one with awe.”

Again, under date of July 27, he thus speaks of the young bird:—

“One of the night-hawk’s eggs is hatched. The young is exactly like a pinch of rabbit’s fur, or down of that colour, dropped on the ground, not two inches long, with a dimpling, somewhat irregular arrangement of minute feathers in the middle, destined to become its wings and tail. Yet even it half opened its eyes and peeped, if I mistake not. Was ever bird more completely protected both by the colour of its eggs and of its own body that sits on them, and of the young bird just hatched? Accordingly the eggs and young are but rarely discovered. There was one egg still, and by the side of it this

little pinch of down fluttered out and was not observed at first. A foot down the hill had rolled half the shell it had come out of. There was no callowness as in the young of most birds. It seemed a singular place for a young bird to begin its life, this little pinch of down, and lie still on the exact spot where the egg lay—a flat, exposed shelf on the side of a bare hill, with nothing but the whole heavens, the broad universe above, to brood it when its mother was away.”

The night-jar is not very widely distributed in our country, being only found in any number in the southern counties. In most of the home-counties, that is, the counties immediately round London, it is found. Wimbledon Common, at certain secluded parts, has its full quota; Holmwood Common, in Surrey, is a good spot for study, and at Epsom and all round Leith Hill and thereabout, ample opportunities for observation and the study of its habits present themselves. It visits some parts of Kent and Essex, and the southern portion of Herefordshire and Wilts.

Various theories have been advanced to account for the presence of the comb-like flange on its middle toe—some holding that it is for the purpose of cleaning its feathers, the shortness of its beak making the mouth hardly effective for the purpose. Our idea is that its use is to clean the quills of the upper beak from the particles of dust and dirt sure to adhere to them in its flight, owing to the presence of the gummy substances with which, as we have said, they are covered.

The night-jar does not stay long with us. If it comes with the nightingale it goes with it to softer, sunnier climes, where some supply of its favourite food is still to be found. It does no more than lay its eggs and rear its brood; then it migrates. How “the little pinch of down,” grown to some semblance of the parent bird, manages the long flight is a mystery, but it does.

The fact that the bird’s flight is so silent, and that in the dimness of evening it has some vague resemblance to an owl, has led it to get the name of owl, with various qualifications, as churr-owl, fern-owl, jar-owl; but it is in several respects a more wonderful bird than the owl; and all that combines to specialise it, as the naturalists say, to make it so wonderful, is closely allied with the protective colouring, habits and instincts, which alone have preserved it against the attacks of so many enemies.

Another large group of animals in which this protective process is especially discernible is the class which assumes a winter dress.

The most prominent of these among quadrupeds are the silver fox, the variable hare, and the stoat or ermine. The fur changes more or less suddenly from the hues that best served for the creature’s protection during the warmer season, to white or to a markedly lighter hue, to show less conspicuously against the snow or the silvery gleam of frost on winter vegetation. And it is curious enough that not only the slower or quicker change is determined by the temperature,

but even the extent to which the change is carried. In opener seasons the white or lighter hue is less decided; in severer, more so. There is no casting off of the fur. The colouring pigments are, so to speak, withdrawn. The stoat, in his rich brown summer coat, could hardly be better protected than by it when among the dying grass and bracken and sandy hedge-sides; but that would serve him ill and make him a very clear mark for his enemies on the wide, unbroken expanse of snow.

The change operates soonest on the portions most exposed—the sides, the belly, the legs. In open seasons indeed patches are left—usually a straight strip down the back and spots on the head and shoulders—these always diminishing if the cold grows more intense. The tip of the tail is always black. Specimens are found in quite a transition stage. It should be added, too, that the more intense the cold, the fur becomes at once the thicker and glossier. The reason of this is obvious, at once to throw off the light and to preserve internal warmth.

In speaking of birds, we did not refer to the most striking instance of the snow-bunting, because its most marked feature is the winter change, of which we will now speak.

Here, as in the case of the quadrupeds, the extent of the change is determined by the measure of winter severity; and evidently, from this fact and other circumstances to be noted immediately, there is present in the bird some prophetic instinct or forecast of weather. In summer the plumage is sufficiently beautiful and distinctive: the head, most part of the breast, and the margins of the feathers above are a tawny orange, mixed here and there with patches of pale grey; and the rest of the upper feathers are brown-black.

The change of colour has nothing to do with moulting. First of all, the colour is withdrawn from the tips of the feathers, and this proceeds downwards and downwards till, at length, all that is exposed to the eye when the feathers are unruffled is white; the under plumage remaining as it was.

The snow-bunting, often called the "snowflake," is a lover of remote hills and dales; and its premature appearance in white plumage or partially white plumage, in the later autumn, often causes no little concern to the hill-farmers in the north, where grain or potatoes may be still exposed; and if they are wise they now lose no time in getting them in, for experience has taught that the advent of the "snowflake," with his partially-changed plumage, means early and severe winter weather; and this more especially if the days should then be clear and fine—one of the most deceptive of all things in higher latitudes at that season.

In principle, it is precisely the same with the ptarmigan in its change from blue-grey to pure white. With regard to it one of our best naturalists says:—

"Great as is the protection afforded by their assimilation to lichen-

coloured rocks in summer, and to snow in winter, there is little doubt that ptarmigan, like other arctic birds and animals which nature has enabled to dispense with summer pigments, derive a further advantage from this change. As white is the colour which most slowly absorbs heat rays, so, by the laws of radiation, it is also the colour which most slowly radiates heat: thus these birds are much less easily deprived of the natural warmth of their bodies in winter than they would be if still clothed with darker plumage. Here there is a double provision of nature for their advantage, acquired by one and the same process of change."

When we turn to insects, the field of illustration is so great as to be perplexing.

Butterflies, many of them, favour the flowers that are of colours akin to those of their wings. The Purple Emperor affects certain wild geraniums, on which, when in repose, it is almost impossible for the eye to detect it; and the brown spotted Fritillaries are so coloured as to match exactly the lichen-dotted leaves of the birch woods which they most frequent.

And if this applies in degree to our native butterflies, some exotics still more directly illustrate the law.

Mr. Wallace tells us that in Sumatra he found a large butterfly with the upper surface of a rich purple, each wing crossed with a broad bar of bright orange. He was eager to find a specimen and persevered in a long hunt. Among the bush and dry leaves he followed where it settled, but without success, for a long time. At last he succeeded, the insect in repose so exactly resembling a dead leaf attached to a twig that even he, an educated and expert field-naturalist, had overlooked it again and again. And evidently it had the fullest faith in its own disguise; for had it stirred on being closely approached, it would at once have been seized with the net.

The true moths—those jewels of the night—*papillons de nuit*, as the French call them, but in many species far more lovely than any butterfly, present in themselves a solid body of evidence.

Why should such lovely colours, such delicacy of form, such grace and exquisite balance and proportion, such silken softness of flight, be hidden, as it were, from the daylight, and from the eyes that would delight to dwell on them? They are so brightly coloured and beautiful, and their enemies are so many, that doubtless, as day-flyers, they would soon be exterminated. The instinct to shun the day is in their case protective.

And so also are the colours of their upper wings, which, in repose, are folded over the under and more brilliant ones—frequently of red, scarlet and crimson of the loveliest tints, with patches of gold, purple, cream-colour, pale grey and green, in the most exquisite combinations.

Usually, these upper wings are of so exact a match with the foliage or the bark of the trees on which they rest by day that only the most skilled eye can detect them. They slumber there so soundly that, as

collectors say, you might pin one to the wood, and it would not awaken or in any way realise the cruel imprisonment imposed on it till its proper hour of awakening had come. This is most evident in the ghost-moth and in the puss-moth, lover of the willow, and in the peach-blossom moth, lover of the bramble.

It has been neatly said of the moths that they put on their night-gowns through the day and their gay morning-gowns through the night.

It is certainly not that they are lovers of the darkness rather than of the light, for Linnæus was not wrong when he gave them the name of *Phalæna*, from the Greek word meaning to fly towards a light; a propensity which all moths have; but in most species happily not so strong as in the common little species with which householders are best acquainted, through its persistent buzzing and darting round the flame of the candle on summer nights, much to their annoyance; and from these, unluckily, the general idea of moths is most directly formed.

The pale brindled beauty moth so closely resembles the trunks of the oak trees, to which it resorts, that it can hardly be detected there when at rest. The buff-tip moth, in repose, is exactly like a piece of stick. The lappet moth looks like a brown ash-leaf. Other species imitate the flowers of the shrubs they frequent, as the holly flower. Others will, if disturbed, slyly work themselves, wedge-like, down into the bottom of the herbage and disappear.

In a few cases other insects are mimicked; and to this mimicry several species owe their preservation. The hornet clear-wing moth bears a remarkable resemblance to the common stinging hornet, and thus escapes falling a prey to many birds who do not relish the insect imitated. It has been observed that one species, *Bryophila perla*, has a great inclination to rest on blue-bricked or stone-coloured walls, resembling its own colours, and that it avoids red bricks, on which it would be easily seen, and if compelled to rest there invariably settles on the mortar. Some moths will even feign death.

The protective habits of most of the larvæ are almost as remarkable. Some have the power of ejecting a disagreeable fluid on being touched or irritated; others, as the caterpillar of the puss-moth, are armed with a scorpion-like tail, which they cast over their back when disturbed or annoyed. The hairy caterpillars are protected by their rough coats. The birds do not care for a hairy exterior and leave them—the preservation of the fox-moth is doubtless due to this characteristic strongly developed in its caterpillar.

Some of the butterflies show the same instincts. When chased, they will fall to the earth and lie quite still till you take your eye off them for a moment, and then they dart away.

The device of the cuttlefish, in squirting out on its enemies a torrent of inky fluid, in which they are blinded, is well known. It is not so well known that the jelly-fishes, those beautiful creatures,

without skeleton, but with a delicate nervous system, of which the Duke of Argyll made such pretty satirical use in the House of Lords when speaking on the Irish Land Bill, have also their own ruses, disguises and defences against enemies.

Some of them—the medusas—have the power of assuming an exact resemblance to a bubble on the surface of the water—against some assailants a sufficient disguise and protection. It is one of the most beautiful sights in nature to see the creature throw off this disguise. First it assumes the form of a tiny basket with a handle, then it quickly throws out a series of little legs, and next develops into a very active jelly-fish, iridescent in the sunshine, as it moves softly in its element.

A species of medusa, common in the Mediterranean, on being irritated and disturbed, becomes for the nonce a stinging-nettle, affecting the human hand when in contact with it exactly in the same way, and causing inflammation of the skin. The same property is possessed by several others found by us between the tropics and on the coast of Spain. Even the British species *Aplisia* cause considerable itching on being handled; though none have yet been found which cause permanent injury to man.

The slimy substances secreted on the skins of eels is doubtless a means of defence, which is made more effective by the electrical properties which some of these, as well as other fishes, possess.

It is easier to collect instances than to account for or explain the origin and development of these remarkable habits and instincts. Some may be accounted for in one way, some in another; but the sense of wonder at such manifestations is not affected by any theory on the matter. Mr. Darwin and his disciples regard them simply as one phase or exhibition of what is now called "the survival of the fittest." The progress of civilization, completely changing the surface of the earth, is also gradually but constantly changing the habits and instincts of the creatures which live upon it as well as the animals themselves. Whole species have disappeared, and are even now disappearing; and though Nature struggles to preserve her own benignant balance, man has not been innocent of conduct calculated in many ways to disturb it. All are factors in the modification of these protective habits and instincts in birds and beasts. They all tend to develop new and singular tendencies in the creatures that remain—the study of which can never fail to be interesting, suggestive and calculated to stir a profound sense of the mystery of animal life and thought.

ALEX. H. JAPP, LL.D.



"GLITTERING GOLD."

ROBERT ETHERIDGE was distinctively and emphatically a "business man." For him there was truer beauty in a faultless balance-sheet than in all the Grosvenor Gallery put together, and sweeter music in the subdued hum of a busy office than in the finest symphony ever written. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that of such trifles as art and music he never thought at all; the severe realities of "business" apparently sufficed to meet every want of his nature.

All Mr. Etheridge's movements were methodical as clockwork. An early breakfast in his bachelor lodgings, a silent journey to town, a long morning given to hard work, a hasty meal brought from the nearest dining-rooms, a second edition of the morning's work, another silent journey, a solitary meal in the lonely room he called "home," an hour's study of the financial columns of the evening papers—Mr. Etheridge was "in the city"—then, to work again till bedtime came, and another day was done.

A hard, pleasureless, monotonous existence—a life which to many men would have been literally maddening, but which had never yet struck Robert Etheridge as other than right and desirable. And yet his nature was neither sordid nor narrow; his impulses were generous and his sympathies catholic. It was scarcely so much his fault as his misfortune that at thirty-four years of age, Mr. Etheridge stood in imminent peril of degenerating into a faultlessly-accurate calculating machine.

Even machines, however, wear out in time, and the complicated human mechanism is, at least, as liable to a break-down as a locomotive. Such a break-down came to Mr. Etheridge during the sultry July days of an almost tropical summer, when London seemed transformed to Calcutta minus all its heat-repelling arrangements. He stood his ground bravely, fighting day after day and week after week against the overpowering lassitude which was sapping the life out of heart and brain, but he had to give in at last.

"You must give up all work for some time, Mr. Etheridge. Total rest of mind and brain, with change of air and scene, are what you require."

This was the ultimatum of the eminent physician whom he was in the end driven to consult.

"Quite impossible, Sir Henry! I cannot possibly spare time to get away just now."

"My dear sir," replied Sir Henry very gravely, "let me ask you the question put by a brother physician in a similar case—'Can you spare the time to die?'"

There was no gainsaying that reply; so most reluctantly and slowly Mr. Etheridge packed his portmanteau, paid a gloomy farewell visit to the office, provided himself with a due supply of circular notes, and left Charing Cross one evening en route for Switzerland, a banished, désœuvré, melancholy man.

At first he was far too little interested in his travels to plan any original route, but simply followed the course of his circular ticket, doing the "regular Swiss round" in mechanical fashion, meeting the same people time after time, passing from one huge overgrown hotel to another which seemed its twin brother, wearily but conscientiously seeing all that his Baedeker told him he ought to see, and mixing up all he saw into glorious confusion in his tired brain.

He visited Berne, and only marvelled how grown-up people could find amusement in patiently watching the little old clock; at Geneva he felt half-blinded by the hard glare of the blazing white quays; Lausanne only made him wonder at the number of its telephone wires; and at Fribourg he vainly tried to take some little interest in its big organ and slender bridges. And still, like Gallio, he "cared for none of these things."

But presently, with returning health and vigour, there gradually awoke in him an unwonted desire to know something more of that "Nature" which he had hitherto considered just a craze of women and painters; and before long, to his own intense astonishment, Robert Etheridge found himself revelling in long solitary excursions among the great white mountains, which till then had uttered in vain their mighty voice of invitation.

"L'appétit vient en mangeant" is true indeed of the fare which the snow-giants set before their guests; and by-and-bye only the necessity for husbanding his returning strength prevented the sober, business man from attempting ascents not beneath the notice of the Alpine Club. But all severe exertion having been strictly forbidden by Sir Henry, Mr. Etheridge had perforce to content himself with less exhausting excursions.

In spite, however, of this newly-awakened faculty for enjoyment, Robert Etheridge remained an eminently unsociable "voyageur," never making any of those pleasant, passing, table-d'hôte acquaintances which to many people give one of its chief zests to foreign travel. Alone he came, and alone he went, drinking in new health for body and mind with each breath of the pure mountain breezes, but remaining as solitary in his delight abroad as he had always been in his labour at home.

"Mein Herr! Herr Engländer! Can I with you one moment speak?"

Mr. Etheridge turned sharply round. It was the busy, courteous host of the Bär at Wilderswyl who called to him.

"Certainly. What is it?"

"You have yesterday asked me, mein Herr, for the road to Grindelwald, nicht wahr? And to-day I have a party who there by carriage go; and they ask me to find one more to take the third seat and share cost. Shall I to them say that you go also?"

Mr. Etheridge looked doubtful. He did not at all like the enforced companionship, yet remembered that seven good miles of hot, dusty road might prove a very wearisome tramp.

"When do they propose starting?" he asked.

"To-day—in one half hour. The carriage is making ready at present. The Herr Engländer will then go?"

"H'm—I don't care if I do."

The ungracious assent was scarcely uttered before the good landlord had bowed his acknowledgments and departed, for time was a precious commodity with him just then.

Already half repenting his compliance, Mr. Etheridge went to his room to prepare for the expedition. It was then about eight o'clock in the morning, and the sun shone forth in all his glory.

"What an idiot I was to say 'Yes,'" he grumbled to himself as he selected his own alpenstock from the array in the long hall-rack. "Now here I am tied for the day to a couple of beer-drinking German students, or a fat Frenchman and his dame, or, worse still, to a pair of 'Arries out for a 'oliday! Well, if they should prove very obnoxious, I can get rid of them somehow, no doubt, even if I have to pay for a carriage and walk, after all."

In the courtyard of the Hotel Robert found the "Einspanner" and its sturdy little steed all ready for departure. Ready, too, was the old dried-up Swiss driver—but of those drawbacks to the day's pleasure, his companions, there was as yet no sign. Just as he was beginning to cherish a hope that after all he might not be called upon to fulfil his over-hasty bargain, the "patron" appeared at the door, ushering towards the "Einspanner"—neither students, nor fat couples, nor rollicking tourists, but—two radiant visions in dainty white costumes and picturesque broad-brimmed hats.

It was too much! Robert Etheridge fairly gasped for breath as the trio appeared.

Had he not been so miserably confused he would speedily have discovered that the enemy seemed at least as much disconcerted as he himself felt. When he did recover consciousness, the visions had retreated to the Hotel door, and a musical voice was speaking in low, rapid tones.

"It is just *too* absurd, Olive! How came Herr Waldstein to be so unutterably idiotic? I asked him in my very choicest German for a *lady* companion, and now he declares I never mentioned the word lady at all! I believe he has done it just to spite me for speaking German to him at all—he is so ridiculously proud of his English! Now what *are* we to do?"

"It seems to me that there is but one thing to be done," answered

a slower and quieter voice. "We must of course stand to our bargain the mistake is ours, and we have no right to inconvenience a stranger by our own stupidity."

Though wholly unaccustomed to the society of ladies, Robert Etheridge was a true gentleman at heart. He came forward at once, bowing with more of chivalrous respect than of easy grace.

"There has been a little mistake, I fear," he said courteously. "Please do not let me be in your way for a moment. I shall follow my original intention and walk to Grindelwald."

He turned to enter the house, but found the doorway completely blocked by the portly form of their host. Poor Herr Waldstein looked quite discomposed by the failure of his neatly-arranged programme.

"Ach, meine Damen!" he exclaimed in pathetic tones. "Why goes it so ill? Why think you such evil at me? The Herr Engländer is *so* comme il faut!—so respectable!—so *old*!"

It was not in human nature to resist the pathos of that climax. For a minute everybody made a brave attempt at dignified unconsciousness, but it was a complete failure; first on one face, then on another a smile flickered, till from the lips of the younger girl there rang out a little musical peal of undisguised laughter.

Of course that laugh decided the matter, and five minutes later the Einspanner was on its way to Grindelwald with three occupants, not reckoning the merry old driver.

When Mr. Etheridge at last found courage to look at his new companions, he knew that the Fates had shown themselves decidedly favourable to him. Both the ladies were prettily dressed in soft white gowns, here and there relieved with skilful touches of blue, and they wore shady hats of Swiss manufacture with "garniture" quite Parisian in its elegant simplicity. Both were young, slender, and refined in appearance. Here, however, the resemblance ended.

The elder of the two was an unmistakable beauty—a tall and stately girl, with finely-modelled features, a perfect complexion, soft, radiant blue eyes, and a wealth of golden-brown waving hair. The expression of her face was calm, not to say cold, and a grave dignity characterised her words and actions.

The younger girl was also fair in complexion, but her features were insignificant, her complexion pale and freckled, and her hair of a dull reddish hue which looked like a caricature of the other's sunlit tresses. Yet, notwithstanding all these defects, the face was not without a certain attractiveness of its own. The eyes were bright and speaking, and the piquant vivacity of the countenance served to distract attention from its shortcomings in other respects. Her voice, too, was exceedingly pleasant, and her lively chatter and comical comments on each new object of interest soon set their chance companion more at his ease. She laughed at the jodelling boys with their monster horns. She laughed at the ragged urchins who

pattered beside the carriage with bunches of dusty edelweiss, little carved chalets, and baskets of wild strawberries. She laughed at their driver's repeated promise to show them some "gemse" in their native haunts. She laughed when again and again the promise failed to be fulfilled.

"Do you really believe in the actual existence of these 'gemse'?" she demanded merrily of her companions. "I don't! I believe they are as much creatures of the imagination as fairies or water-sprites. I intend to make out a new list of fabulous animals some day, and to insert together with unicorns and phoenixes the world-famed 'gemse' of Switzerland. Tell me now"—turning to Mr. Etheridge—"did *you* ever see a chamois?"

"I must confess I have not yet done so," admitted Robert. "But at any rate I have eaten one—or part of one, rather. That was at Salvan, I remember."

"Bah! You have eaten a brown mess which the waiter *called* chamois—an ancient goat, in all probability—but what has that to do with seeing one of those slender, exquisitely-graceful creatures standing with its four fairy feet balanced on a pinnacle of rock just a little less sharp than a darning-needle? That is what I want to see. And if I do not see it before we go home, I shall remain convinced that the chamois exists only in the imagination of these superstitious old drivers and the fancy of the wood-carvers."

So she chatted on as the carriage rolled along the dusty road beside the foaming Lutschine, and slowly mounted the steep ascent to Grindelwald. The elder girl contributed little to the enlivenment of the way except the fact of her beautiful presence. She spoke little, and seemed almost lost in contemplation of the surrounding glories, though whether because honestly in harmony with them or in proud avoidance of the stranger it was impossible to say.

When the Einspanner at length discharged its load in front of one of the Grindelwald hotels, Mr. Etheridge felt decidedly perplexed as to his further movements. Ought he, uninvited, to obtrude his company upon the fair strangers in their visit to the glaciers? or ought he at once to depart, abandoning them to the tender mercies of the ragged unprofessional "guides," who already attacked them? It was a nice point of etiquette, in which Robert's inexperience could furnish him with no precedent; but the matter was promptly settled for him. Having resolutely dismissed the would-be guides in her pretty broken German, the younger girl turned to him with a merry smile.

"Of course you are going to the glaciers, Mr. ——?"

"Etheridge, at your service. Yes, I am going there, I suppose."

"Then we shall make one party, Mr. Etheridge, unless you have made other arrangements?"

Robert murmured something about being "very happy," though he himself could not have told you whether he spoke truth or false-

hood. He knew so little of young ladies that he felt utterly dazed and bewildered by the events of the morning, and as the three walked along the narrow paths leading to the glacier he shrank more and more into silence, abashed before the beauty of the one woman and the lively self-possession of the other.

"I think we ought to exchange confidences in the matter of names," said the younger girl presently. "You, we know now, are Mr. Etheridge; and we are Olive and Nellie Branscombe, not long ago both of us hard-worked teachers in the school where we had formerly been pupils. Olive taught drawing, while I heard little imps of children strum scales and finger-exercises all day long, and we had nothing in the world but each other. Can you imagine our delight when an old great-aunt, whom we had never seen, took it into her head to die, and leave us what you would most likely call a few paltry thousands each? To us they seemed inexhaustible riches, and we are still quite tête-montée with the wonder of the whole thing."

Her sister's quiet voice here interrupted the rapid flow of words.

"You forget, Nellie, all this cannot greatly interest Mr. Etheridge however interesting to ourselves."

"Nonsense, Olive! Don't I always know by instinct whether people are interested or not? Mr. Etheridge is intensely interested in what I am saying—are you not?"

She turned briskly to him with one of her sudden, bird-like movements, but before he could frame a reply she resumed her interrupted story.

"It had been the dream of both our lives to travel—Olive wanted to see places and I wanted to see people—so as soon as we could shake ourselves free from schoolroom trammels, we packed up our trunks and set off. Even in the midst of a very bad crossing we remembered that we were free women at last and were happy."

Miss Nellie laughed even at the memory of their sea-sickness.

"Now you know how we come to be here, Mr. Etheridge, wandering about, two 'maidens all forlorn,' and I assure you, you are the very first acquaintance we have made since we arrived in Switzerland."

Robert felt miserably conscious that a polite reply to this concluding statement was expected from him, but after a vain and agonised search for the proper words, he at last fell back upon a grave bow as the only answer he could reasonably hope to complete.

II.

"But rarely human eye has known
A scene so stern as that dread lake,
With its dark ledge of barren stone—
Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,
Nor aught of vegetative power
The weary eye may ken ;
For all is rocks at random thrown,
Black waves, bare crags, and banks of stone."

ROBERT ETHERIDGE knew no poetry, or surely these lines must have recurred to memory as he gazed on the gloomy Dauben See at the summit of the Gemmi Pass. A mile or so behind him lay the only habitation he had seen for hours, the little Schwarenbach Inn with its black and ghostly-looking barn ; on his right stretched the cold grey waters of the long narrow lake, while on every side rose bare peaks of slaty rock, their bases encumbered with great mounds of crumbling, unpicturesque débris. No sign of human existence was to be seen except the rude track, little wider than a sheep-track, which skirted the edge of the lake.

Although Robert Etheridge had travelled some considerable distance that day, and was beginning to find each mile decidedly longer than the last, he did not stop to gaze long on this wild and dreary, yet striking scene. The weather had been unsettled when he started that morning from Kandersteg, and now the clouds hung low and threatening in the sky, a boding stillness rested over everything, and the subtle odour of gathering electricity oppressed the atmosphere. A more desolate scene in which to encounter an Alpine storm it would be hard to find, and a solitary traveller might well hasten his steps at the thought, weary though those steps might chance to be.

But all the haste Mr. Etheridge could make proved vain. Before he had left the lake behind him the first heavy drops of rain splashed sullenly into its dark, still waters, and a sudden icy blast whistled shrilly through the pass. Low distant rumblings and mutterings were heard, then the jagged peaks on the left stood sharply out for a moment against a vivid background of steel-blue lightning, a terrific crash of thunder followed, and in another minute the full force of the storm was upon him. The wind howled and raged from every quarter at once, the sullen waters rose into angry black waves, and the rain fell in one continuous torrent.

Half-blinded by the almost incessant glare, nearly deafened by the reverberating roar, drenched to the skin by the descending torrent, beaten back at every step by the fierce ice-cold blast, Robert struggled slowly forward, fighting his way inch by inch over the rough, uneven path. In vain he strove to discern some slightest coign of vantage against the fury of the tempest ! the pitiless barren peaks held out no hope of shelter to even the keenest gaze. Stay ! There,

about a hundred yards away, he spies one solitary block of fallen rock, which may perhaps afford a moment's breathing space if he can get under its lee.

But when at last he had fought his way across the shifting shingle of broken slate which separated him from the boulder, Mr. Etheridge started back in dismay. Two human forms—women's forms—lay huddled together at its base, crushed to the earth by mingled terror and fatigue. He struggled to their side, and in another minute had recognised his companions in that sunny drive to Grindelwald a fortnight before.

"Get up at once," he shouted with the whole force of his lungs. "You must not stay here a minute longer. We must get to the inn at the end of the pass somehow!"

His voice was all but lost in the roar overhead, but the terrified girls understood his gestures and obeyed him instinctively. Together the three breasted the hurricane, which struck them with almost the force of an actual wave. It was a desperate demand on their failing strength, but now that they were no longer alone the girls showed themselves both brave and patient, and made the most of their slender powers. An hour later the three travellers, exhausted almost to the point of unconsciousness, staggered into the kitchen of the little wooden inn standing on the brink of that gigantic wall of rock which frowns down upon Leukerbad.

Three days from that time the rain is still falling heavily and steadily. For forty-eight hours the tempest had raged almost continuously, and still the rain keeps the travellers close prisoners in the tiny Wildstrübel Inn, impatient enough, no doubt, yet thankful for even its scanty accommodation as they gaze at the desolate scene without.

"Surely it cannot rain much longer in this unconscionable fashion, Mr. Etheridge? We must have had whole Rhones-full of water in the last three days! Don't you think we really shall get down to Leukerbad to-morrow?"

Nellie Branscombe and the gentleman she addresses sit trifling over an improvised draught-board in the little sanded parlour, while her sister, stationed by the window, is engaged on a sketch of the two players.

"I hope so, Miss Nellie," answers Robert cautiously; "but it is quite impossible to make any engagements on behalf of such weather as this."

"Do you really *hope* it?"

The vibrant, musical voice is lowered almost to a whisper, and the bright eyes are lifted for a momentary but speaking glance. A slight flush rises to Robert's face as he answers.

"Yes, for your sake. You will be glad to return to the comforts of civilization again."

"Have I seemed so very unhappy here, then?"

"By no means. You have——"

"Come here, Nellie," interrupts Olive just at that moment. "I want you to tell me what you think of these heads."

Miss Nellie looks just the least bit in the world annoyed, but does as she is bid.

"What spite are you nourishing against Mr. Etheridge, I wonder, Olive? You have certainly not flattered my unfortunate face; but to him you have been simply merciless."

"Do you think so?" asks the gentleman under discussion, masculine vanity and curiosity having conquered his natural shyness and drawn him irresistibly to the sketch. "To me, now, the likeness seems very good."

"You must be modest, indeed, if that is really your opinion," says his late opponent, not without some little significance.

"I drew Mr. Etheridge as I saw him." Olive's tones are quiet and even as ever.

"Then decidedly we see with different eyes."

The words are spoken almost in a whisper, but they do not fail to reach Mr. Etheridge's sharp ears.

For three whole days the trio had now been shut up together in the little inn—a length of time probably equal to at least three years of "society" intercourse—and for one, at any rate, of the three, it was a new and fateful experience.

Bereaved of every accustomed occupation, cut off from ledgers and balance-sheets, deprived of mailbags and telegrams, destitute of newspapers and financial columns, Robert Etheridge found himself for the first time in his life forced into intimate relations with two young and attractive ladies.

Of Olive and her stately beauty the prudent business man from the first entertained a most wholesome awe, not to say an actual dread. Beauties, he had always heard, were "kittle cattle to shoe behind," and confused recollections of Delilah, Jezebel, Cleopatra, Medea and the Sirens rose warningly to mind whenever he caught his eyes resting with pleasure on Olive's perfect features and graceful form.

It was with a sense of positive relief that Mr. Etheridge turned to plain, homely little Miss Nellie. Here, at any rate, was no radiant beauty to dazzle his eyes and confound his judgment; here he might safely venture to accept the overtures of friendship so frankly and simply offered him. In his enforced idleness and seclusion her good-natured efforts to relieve the tedium of the long slow hours soon made him feel more at home with Miss Nellie than with three-fourths of the men of his acquaintance.

This much Mr. Etheridge confessed to himself very early in the course of their imprisonment; yet even as he did so, he heaved a regretful sigh to the memory of the absent ledgers.

But by the time the third day drew to its close, Robert had grown

to endure the absence of those same ledgers with the most stoical and amazing calmness. Miss Nellie he had in the meantime discovered was a very remarkable young lady. Her ready fund of bright conversation, her unfailing good-humour, and her numberless dainty devices for contriving comfort out of discomfort, and amusement out of dreariness itself, all united to win his admiration. But above all, Mr. Etheridge was struck with her keen and rapid insight into his own idiosyncrasies. Never before had he realised how much that was original and interesting there lay concealed beneath the crust of his acquired silence and reserve. How came this young and inexperienced girl to understand his character better than he had ever before understood it himself? The only answer he could find to this question was the fact that Miss Nellie Branscombe was a very remarkable girl indeed!

III.

"HAVE you heard the news, Olive? Mr. Etheridge says that a portion of the path down to Leukerbad has been completely destroyed by the storm."

Olive looked up from her drawing with a troubled brow.

"That means, I suppose, that we must stay here till it is repaired."

"Unless you prefer to go all the way back to Spiez again. But they say the path will be ready by Thursday; the peasants are at work on it already."

"Another two days to wait here! I am very sorry, Nellie; the sooner we leave here the better for all of us."

Just then Mr. Etheridge entered the only sitting-room the little party possessed.

"So we are to be prisoners here for yet another day or two, Miss Branscombe," he remarked in no very dismayed accents.

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Olive abruptly.

A somewhat awkward pause followed. It was broken presently by her sister, who had been inspecting the weather from the window.

"Well, at any rate, the rain has stopped for a few minutes. Won't you come out with me, Mr. Etheridge, and see if we can find that edelweiss they said grew so near the house?"

Robert accepted the invitation with marked alacrity.

"I will come too," said Olive, as she gathered together her painting paraphernalia.

"How can you be so foolish, Olive? You who take cold so easily from wet feet! Now I could sit under a waterfall all day without fear of even a sneeze afterwards."

"The fresh air will do me good."

Olive's manner was so quietly determined that no further opposition could with decency be offered.

"That girl follows her sister about like some suspicious old

Spanish duenna!" So thought Mr. Etheridge as the trio left the house together. "One might really imagine she grudged every look and word not offered as incense at her own beautiful shrine. But I suppose all beauties are alike in demanding universal adoration, and resenting its being withheld by even the humblest individual."

This shadowy opposition was exactly what was needed to open Mr. Etheridge's eyes to the true nature of his admiration for plain, pleasant Miss Nellie; and once having grasped the fact that he really had at last "fallen in love," his business habit of prompt and decisive action impelled him to learn his fate with as little delay as possible. During the two following days he waited and watched for a favourable opportunity; nor, though the least vain of men, could he well doubt that Miss Nellie was far from unwilling to accord him that grace. A dozen times the two were on the point of rambling away on some well-devised pretext, and a dozen times did Olive's lovely face assume a look of steady determination as she prepared to accompany them.

But when two people are mutually bent on such an interview, even the cleverest of duennas will assuredly find herself outwitted in the long run. The path to Leukerbad was not ready quite so soon as they had hoped; and late one evening Olive, who had been summoned upstairs for a conference with their landlady, found on her return to the sitting-room that it was empty, nor could she find any clue to the whereabouts of its late occupants.

Meanwhile the fugitives were standing on the edge of the mighty wall of rock which looks down upon Leukerbad and towers nearly two thousand feet above it in perpendicular majesty. Far in the distance, across the fertile plain at their feet, the rays of the setting sun rested on the lovely chain of Monte Rosa, and every silver peak blushed crimson in the soft rosy light. They gazed almost in silence till the last bright gleam had died away and only a pale glimmering sheen remained.

"Our last evening on the Gemmi," said Nellie, softly and sadly. "To-morrow—good-bye to the poor old Wildstrübel, and back again to tables d'hôte and civilization."

"Will it be good-bye to me also, Miss Nellie?"

There was a meaning in Robert Etheridge's grave voice which no woman could mistake.

"Good-bye to you, Mr. Etheridge? Well, of course in one sense it must be. We can't go wandering about the country together in shepherd and shepherdess fashion, you know. Switzerland is not Arcadia, after all." Nellie sighed softly. "But we shall certainly hope to see you again somewhere, in the great someday, as the Fates may determine for us."

"The Fates obey our wishes sometimes if we will to have it so," said Robert, slowly and pointedly. "Miss Nellie, you have not known me long, but I think you know me well. Could you trust me

sufficiently to give me leave to try and win you for my wife? I have never cared for any other woman before."

A gleam of pleasure flashed over his companion's face as she listened to his simple, straightforward words, but there was no tremor in her voice as she answered them.

"You do me far too much honour, Mr. Etheridge. I feel the full force of the compliment; but I assure you my newly-gained liberty is too precious to be sacrificed for any man living."

Mr. Etheridge looked closely into the girl's face. Surely it was triumph, undisguised triumph, which lent that sparkle to her eyes and that flush to her cheeks?

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked quietly, "that you have no regard whatever for me? that your looks and words through this past week have been just so many false beacons luring me on to make a fool of myself?"

"Oh, not a fool, Mr. Etheridge! It would be a very bad compliment to me to call yourself so hard a name just for paying a passing tribute to my poor attractions."

Miss Nellie smiled her brightest smile as she spoke, but Robert's face only grew the colder and harder.

"You have not yet answered my question. Have you, or have you not, any such regard for me as you have assuredly made me believe you had?"

"Indeed, Mr. Etheridge, you have curiously deceived yourself in that is the interpretation you have placed on the ordinary civilities one shows to a pleasant travelling acquaintance."

Robert Etheridge turned on his heel, and without another word left her standing there alone.

He went straight into the little parlour where Olive sat solitary in the twilight.

"Miss Branscombe," he said, curtly, "your sister has fooled me to the top of her bent, and now I have got my dismissal. Good-bye. I shall be off in the morning before you are up."

In silence, and with down-dropped eyes, Olive gave him her hand, nor did she again look up till Mr. Etheridge had quitted the room.

IV.

"Be silent, Nellie. I will not hear another word about it. I tell you again, you are a shame and a misery to me!"

"Dear me, what a storm in a tea-cup! And all because someone has dared to prefer my poor attractions to your own statuesque magnificence!"

"You know you are speaking falsely. You have lured this man on, as you have lured others before him, just as a sacrifice to your insatiable vanity. But it shall be for the last time. I have done my utmost to prevent this happening, and I warn you that the next time

I see the game beginning, at any cost to myself I will speak out plainly."

"And earn for yourself some such sobriquet as 'The Beautiful Jealousy!' Why, I could turn such a proceeding to my own advantage with all the ease imaginable! Ah, my dear, you may have the beauty, no doubt—but the wit, that is mine! and I will show people which pays the best in the long run. With all your beauty you have never yet had one single downright offer of marriage, while I have had already nearly a dozen."

"You are boasting of your shame, Nellie. But for this man—he was made of different stuff from the others you have trifled with; he knew nothing of the arts of such girls as you, and his honest kindness to both of us ought to have been his protection from your unwomanly vanity."

A low, light laugh answered her words.

"He seems to have gained *one* of our hearts, at any rate!"

"No man will ever win my heart so easily. But I say plainly that I both like and respect Mr. Etheridge, and it was hard to give him my hand in silence this evening, Nellie, dumb from very shame of my own sister's conduct."

"Oh, don't distress yourself, I beg; you are not my keeper. And besides, I only filled a temporary gap in the good man's heart. Have you not yet discovered, my dear, that Mr. Etheridge's real mistress is—Business? If his usual occupations had been at hand, do you suppose he would ever have wasted a thought upon me? Business, my dear Olive, is to him all-sufficient."

"It may have been so in the past, but it can never be so again, Nellie. You have awakened in him new hopes and new desires, which will die hard in a man of his resolute nature. And you did this deliberately, with no other intention than that of crushing those hopes at their strongest! Oh, I may well be ashamed of my sister!"

Could this be Olive Branscombe's calm, even voice—these passionate tones of pain and indignation—or was he still dreaming? Robert Etheridge, with a sudden start, shook himself wide awake and conscious. No, he had not dreamed the impassioned words which still rang in his ears. The two voices were still audible in the silence of the night, but now so lowered that only subdued murmurs reached him. Evidently the room next his own was that night for some unknown reason occupied by the sisters, and their voices, penetrating the slight wooden partitions of the chalet, had half awakened him from the restless slumber into which after long tossing to and fro he had at length fallen. He had been dreaming of Nellie, and the voices had so woven themselves into his dream that at first he could scarcely tell how much he had dreamt and how much heard. But the substance of the conversation remained indelibly printed on his brain, and the earnest, indignant tones of Olive's protest still sounded in his

ears. Was it possible that for *his* sake the stately, quiet beauty had so roused herself? That it was *his* cause she had pleaded so fervidly in the quiet night hours? With what kindly warmth she had spoken of him! While he in his heart had been blindly unjust and ungenerous towards her. He had misjudged her cruelly, imputing to her the meanest of a woman's faults, and this was how she repaid him. Truly, all that glitters is not gold, but Mr. Etheridge confessed to himself there and then that he had forgotten the converse was equally true. Glittering gold, as well as its counterfeit, does exist in this world after all.

Next morning, to the surprise of the sisters, Mr. Etheridge appeared at the breakfast-table as usual; looking very much himself, too; for it takes more than one restless night to leave any visible print on the face of a man. Towards Miss Nellie his manner was quietly cool and indifferent, but to her sister he showed a new and gentle deference for which Olive was wholly unprepared.

That day the three travellers together descended the steep, zig-zag path hewn out of the face of the almost perpendicular rock, arriving safely, after a somewhat exciting descent, at the quaint little town of Leukerbad, a place which exists just to bathe and be bathed.

Mr. Etheridge secured rooms for himself in a different hotel from the sisters, but contrived nevertheless to pass in their society the greater part of the week he spent at Leukerbad. Together the little party visited the famous baths where ladies and gentlemen stew in company in the hot mineral water, chattering, chess-playing, reading, coffee-drinking, apparently quite at ease, though only their heads and hands are to be seen above the water. Together too they walked in the pleasant avenues where the bathers congregate during the limited portion of their day not devoted to the serious business of soaking. It was comical to recognise in the Parisian belles and their elegant cavaliers the faces they had last seen emerging from the waters like so many Ararats above a universal deluge.

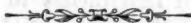
Although Robert Etheridge thus lingered in her society, it was quite useless for Nellie Branscombe to try and persuade herself that any hope of future relenting on her part caused the delay. Always courteous and considerate for her comfort, Mr. Etheridge showed a quiet indifference to her liveliest sallies and brightest smiles, which mortified that young lady's vanity more keenly than the bitterest reproaches could have done.

It was to Olive that Robert now turned for companionship; nor did he strive to win her confidence in vain. Under her dignified and reserved demeanour he soon discovered depths of feeling and a wealth of thought compared with which Nellie's ready show of sympathy was hollowness itself. Certainly he did not find in her any easy flattery of his own weak points, or special interest in himself and his own peculiarities, and there were many outworks of

maiden pride and shyness to be surmounted one by one. Olive had said truly that no man would win her heart without trouble. Still, before the little party broke up, Mr. Etheridge had obtained from Miss Branscombe a definite permission to see her again in England, and with this concession as a parting grace he returned to London, fully restored to health, and apparently well contented with his journey and its results.

Robert Etheridge is still a "business man," but he is now something more than that in addition. He has found for himself many interests beyond the narrow limits of his daily work, and the realms of art and nature are no longer to him unexplored regions. Solitary evenings and a lonely fireside are also things of the past, and over his once cheerless home there now presides a gracious and graceful woman, whose beauty of outward form is a true index to the beauty of her character. "Glittering Gold!" Robert Etheridge often says to himself as his eyes rest fondly on her lovely face—but I doubt whether he has even now so far overcome the natural instincts of a "business man" as to utter the sentiment aloud!

JESSIE LEETE.



SONNET.

OH! woman, teacher thou of man, whom we
 Alternately insult or glorify
 With scorn as vain as is our flattery—
 More than thy milk receiveth man from thee,
 For what thou wert he evermore shall be,
 And with him nations. Be but pure and great
 And they are mighty; fall, and their estate
 Lies in the dust. Fruit know we from the tree.
 As in thy being man's once lay enshrined,
 So thine in his. In man we woman have;
 And where her heart is sordid, man we find
 Of toil and gold and self the haggard slave.
 And teacher-woman, where low is thy mind,
 More low doth grovel man's from birth to grave.

JULIA KAVANAGH.

FAIR NORMANDY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC. ETC.



HÔTEL DE VILLE.

THE shadows of night were beginning to fall as we steamed out of Evreux on our way to Chartres. They had quite fallen when we reached Dreux, where we found we had an hour or two to wait before the train would take us onward. We were glad of the delay, and felt the time would be profitably spent in seeing a little of the town, which is one of the most ancient in France, and has played its part in French history. The fact that darkness had fallen would only add a sense of mystery, an additional interest to our inspection. For darkness appeals to the imagination;

rouses it to activity; gives a certain beauty and romance to what by day might be very commonplace; it softens outlines, and if it conceals beauties, it also draws a veil over defects.

We left our numerous hand packages in the care of a rash but obliging railway official, who, after one glance at H. C.'s amiable expression, felt certain of a substantial recognition of his services. In truth he would have earned his fee, for he was undertaking no slight charge.

H. C.'s packages accumulate as he progresses through a country. Every old curiosity shop in every town he comes to is visited and ransacked. Whatever he thinks curious, genuine and artistic, whatever takes his fancy, he buys. Things too large to be carried are sent direct to England, "über land und meer." Other things, sma'l

and fragile, he will not allow to be packed, but, done up in brown paper and tied with a string, looking neither safe nor elegant, he burdens himself with the precious articles and goes on his way rejoicing. In this manner, and with this collection, he passes from town to town; very much after the fashion of the itinerant chinamender, who frequents country roads, stops at a wayside door, puts his rivets into your broken crockery, and—occasionally—your silver spoons into his pocket. Not that H. C. is addicted to—but the assertion is unnecessary. So it comes to pass that I have occasionally known him return to his native shores carrying sufficient plates and dishes, separately done up in brown paper, to form a harlequin dinner-set. And it invariably happened that in arriving at a destination, or in changing trains, the difficulty of making four hands do the work of forty; the everlasting wonder as to whether something had not been left behind, or some particular string was not loosening and jeopardising a costly Sèvres dish or an ancient (I dare not add hideous) Majolica plate, has frequently reduced the writer to the verge of brain fever.

At Evreux, for instance, we had received a severe shock.

It has been recorded that the hotel had turned out in a body to bid us farewell and speed us on our way: amiable landlord and electrified waiters. It is an attention that we like, and when it is wanting, we feel that, in some way or other, our visit has missed its mark. Of course we speak of France, not of England, where too often these little courtesies of life, which mean so much, are conspicuous by their absence. In France it is very rarely so, and travelling is thereby made much more agreeable.

We had rattled off from the hotel in Evreux in the unsteady omnibus, and had gone quite two hundred yards on our way, when we espied a waiter tearing frantically after us, with shouts sufficient to wake the Seven Sleepers. I turned pale, and anxiously looked at H. C.; but he assured me that he had not, in a fit of poetical abstraction, packed up the hotel plate.

The matter indeed proved quite the other way. He had bought some rare old silver in Rouen, elegant and chaste designs of the First Empire period, which, carefully packed in a box (silver would not break), he treasured as the apple of his eye. This he had stowed away in safety at the inn, and had forgotten and left behind in his usual fit of abstraction. It was this that the waiter had discovered, and with this he was now struggling after us. How H. C. became excited, stopped the omnibus, received the messenger as one to whom he owed an eternal debt of gratitude, bestowed largesse upon him, and dismissed him with his blessing, may be recorded but can never be realised.

It will thus be seen that the charge undertaken by the porter at Dreux was a heavy responsibility.

We went out into the night. It was very dark. A long, wide road

led from the railway station to the town. Far down we could see lights gleaming and other signs of life and animation. We crossed a bridge, and looked over into the dark waters of the little river Blaise, a tributary of the larger Eure, which flows on its course three miles away. The waters of the Blaise were silent and sluggish, dark and cold; nothing was reflected upon their sombre surface.

Presently we reached a wide, well-formed square, in one corner of which stood the fine old church of Dreux. In the darkness it looked grand and majestic. As usual, its outlines seemed exaggerated by obscurity. There was that silence and solemnity about it which at all times appeal to one's deepest and highest emotions; ever yielding a pleasure so akin to pain that we know not which of the two predominates. Is it the mighty building itself which so affects us? or the dark canopy of the sky in its immensity? or the brooding mystery of night, all such an emblem of death and eternity, such a paraphrase, as it seems, of the long, solitary, unknown journey to the land that is very far off?

The church of Dreux belongs to the 12th-15th centuries, and is dedicated to St. Peter. The exterior has been a good deal injured by time, and to-night, in the darkness, its unfinished tower had all the picturesque effect of a ruin.

We passed through the doors of the great west front into the interior. It was large and lofty, and, dimly lighted, looked infinitely solemn and mysterious. It is late in style with the exception of the north transept and the arches of the crossing, which we thought very fine; but it appeared to have been much injured by restoration. The organ case—as is so often found in Normandy—was magnificent.

As we walked down the silent aisles, our footsteps echoed through the edifice and seemed to disturb the repose of centuries; our shadows flitted like ghosts over pillars and pavement. We peered through the closed doors of the choir, and out of the deepest obscurity ghostly images seemed to return our gaze and question our desires. Why did we disturb their quiet repose, the slumber of ages? Of the stained glass of the windows, which is said to be good, we could not judge. We looked up, and marked the pointed outlines, but the coloured transparencies were lost in the gloom of night.

As we turned to leave it all, one solitary human being—a young man; apparently a workman—entered, and marching quickly up the aisle with a light step, knelt before the image of, no doubt, his patron saint.

Was this his daily custom? Did this one solitary being, out of a whole town's population, come to worship here alone night after night? Was he formed of such material as the early monks were made? or of such stuff as would bring forth another Thomas à Kempis? or did he feel within him the devotion and fanatic enthusiasm of a Savonarola? What was he praying for? Absolution? or happiness? or success in life? Was he doing battle with some mortal sin? or

giving thanks for youth and health, the grandeur of living, the glory of possessing a distinct and individual existence, making him heir of the world?

There was nothing to tell us, and we could not ask him. We left him in an attitude of deep devotion, apparently of religious fervour. We would have given much to enter into conversation with him : to learn his history, his thoughts of life, his hopes and ambitions ; but time and the place forbade. A little lamp burning threw its light upon him, and cast a faint shadow upon the pavement. We left him to silence and solitude and went out into the night again.

In days gone by, the far off days of the Middle Ages, this church, the whole town, indeed, was the scene of a curious ceremony. On Christmas eve, a procession was formed consisting of priests, magistrates, aldermen, women and children. The ceremony, half civil, half religious, was called "La Fête des Flambarde," for the reason that most of those who took part in it carried a *flambarde* or torch, consisting of a piece of wood six feet long, very much dried, split in two, and lighted. These blazed out in the darkness with weird and singular effect.

The procession started from the market place, their torches glaring and flaming, and at a rapid, almost running pace, passed through certain streets of the town, finally reaching the church, of which, more soberly and solemnly, it made the complete circuit.

They then brought up in front of the great doorway, each resting his torch upon the ground, and whilst these burnt themselves out, they sang the hymn, *Veni, Redemptor Gentium!* The air took up the tale, the harmony swelled out into the distance, and people quite far off in the neighbouring country caught the sound of the voices, and took up the refrain—*Veni, Redemptor Gentium!*

In the procession people were placed according to their rank. All through the town they sang hymns in honour of Christmas. Violins and drums were stationed in different parts, and the effect must have been somewhat bewildering. Mangers were carried by young people dressed in white, and these must have contributed not a little to the singular appearance of the ceremony : a ceremony that, begun in the Middle Ages, was only discontinued in the last century.

The early history of Dreux is lost in obscurity. It is said to be anterior to the Druids, of which singular and mysterious people it is supposed to have been a great centre. It is, in fact, imagined that there is some affinity between the names Dreux and Druid. Of course it was known to the Romans, who called it Durocassis or Drocae, and it would be singular if interesting Roman Remains were not found in the neighbourhood. We cannot be too thankful that the Roman name at least has not remained as a legacy. It is only towards the beginning of the 11th century that the history of Dreux may be followed with tolerable accuracy. It was first governed by

lords or chiefs elected by the people. These were followed by hereditary chiefs, who, from being vassals to the throne of France, gradually became absolute monarchs of their little kingdom.

In the Middle Ages, like most French towns, Dreux was divided into districts, and its affairs were governed by a species of Civil Court. Justice was administered and all public affairs were directed by a Mayor and Aldermen, who erected the quaint, curious, strangely interesting and beautiful little building of which we give an illustration, and which to-day is called the Town Hall.

Here all public matters are attended to, and Justice, with eyes blindfolded and scales carefully balanced, deals forth equity. The bell in the tower, cast in the reign of Charles IX., was decorated with bas-reliefs representing the ceremony of the Flambards, and this bell rang out upon the night air during the progress of the procession. It must have been a strange mingling of sounds, not altogether sweet, not soft and low, but quaint and original; and one could almost wish that it still continued, for the sake of assisting at this relic of old times.

It was here, in the plains of Dreux, between the Blaise and the Eure, that the great battle was fought known as the *Journée de Dreux*, in 1562: a day of terrible slaughter between the Roman Catholics under the Duc de Guise, and the Huguenots under the Prince de Condé. The Catholics were victorious, and the Prince was taken prisoner.

Dreux has indeed gone through all the vicissitudes of a country given up to frequent changes of government. It has seen all the horrors and desolation of war. Six times it has been besieged. Now it has fallen and become a dependency of the French throne; now, freeing itself, has submitted to the rule of the Counts of Dreux. It formed the dowry of the powerful and bigoted, the cruel and relentless Catherine de Medicis; and the sad fate of the Huguenots seemed to culminate at its very gates when the tide of the *Journée de Dreux* turned against them and their champion was taken captive.

All these bygone ceremonies and events make Dreux very interesting, and we felt as we passed through the winding streets that we were treading on ground consecrated by the lapse of ages.

Not that the houses themselves bore much trace of antiquity. They seemed for the most part modern, with very little form or comeliness of outline. The quaintest, most interesting building, was the *Hôtel de Ville* near the great church. It stands with its back to the square, focussed by the narrow street; a curious Mediæval monument, with rich sculptures and latticed windows, and a high roof surmounted by a small turret or bell-tower, reminding one forcibly of some of the quaint and curious monuments of the dead cities of the Zuyder Zee. Some of its rooms are now devoted to a museum, but nothing they contain can be half so interesting and worthy of study as the exterior of the building itself.

Turning our backs upon this, before us rose the picturesque and beautiful hill, which throws a glamour of romance over the town of Dreux, redeeming it for ever, in spite of the modern handiwork of man, from the tame and the commonplace.

As we saw it to-night, faintly outlined, it looked full of beauty ; its steep and rugged sides towering to a considerable height ; an apparent wilderness of shrubs and trees adorning it with delightful wildness and profusion. The height is crowned by the ruins of the castle of the Comtes de Dreux, those powerful nobles of the Middle Ages, who became extinct towards the close of the 14th century. The ruins now consist of the remains of an old donjon, a Norman gateway, and a Gothic chapel dating from the 12th century. In 1590 and again in 1593, Henri IV. besieged the town, and on the second occasion destroyed the castle.

Upon the summit of the hill, enclosed within walls, in the midst of a beautiful garden, surrounded by walks, which by day are free to the world, and whence you have a magnificent panorama of the town at your feet, the winding rivers and far stretching plains : in the midst of this little paradise rises the modern chapel, built in the form of a Greek temple, surmounted by a cupola, which is the mausoleum of the House of Orleans. It was erected by Louis Philippe when he was Duke of Orleans. Here are interred the last Duchesse de Penthièvre ; the Princesse de Lamballe, massacred at the Revolution ; the beautiful and accomplished Princesse Marie of Wurtemberg, daughter of the King ; the Duke of Orleans and the mother of Louis Philippe. But it was only in 1876 that the bodies of the King and Queen, the Duchess of Orleans, and the Princes of Condé, were removed from Weybridge and placed here in the chapel of the Virgin.

This we much wished to see, but it was a winding and uphill walk from the town. Should we have time to do it ? What if we lost the train onward to Chartres ? What of H. C.'s priceless curiosities, left in charge of the porter ? of our heavier gear, which, registered for Chartres, would certainly go on without us ? That at least was safe, thanks to the admirable French system of registration : admirable, except at the moment that you have to register your own baggage, and find yourself at the end of a long and very slowly decreasing string of passengers ; or in front of an irritating registering clerk, who seems to be attending to everything on earth except his legitimate business, and turns an absolutely deaf ear to your mild remonstrances. It is at these moments that you need the amiability of a saint and the patience of Job, though the chances are that you possess neither the one nor the other. Happy the man who can take all things calmly ; who, in moments of irritation, commands his temper and keeps under subjection his nervous system, and by means of a polite smile conceals the agonies he is suffering as successfully as the Spartan lad concealed the terrible fox. It is the truest philosophy :

and the philosopher is a great gainer. He has done more, we are told, than conquer a city.

We determined to make the attempt, risk the train and the priceless objects of bigotry and virtue, as Mrs. Malaprop would have it, and plunged boldly from the town into the outskirts.

It was a very dark, very winding road, curiously countrified ; not lonely, or desolate or deserted, for there were houses on either side, with interregnums of empty spaces which seemed in possession of the air, the trees and smaller vegetation ; and, on the right, the precipitous hill-side.

The houses were varied and curious, given up to all sorts of trades and occupations. Houses of many forms and sizes ; narrow and upright, low and straggling, following upon each other. One was an inn ; an old-fashioned French auberge ; and as we approached it, a light square cart came tearing down the hill, apparently from the outside country, and drew up with an abruptness which sent the horse on its haunches, and the ladies all but flying out of the vehicle. They looked like buxom farmer's wife and daughter, born into the world without superfluous nerves, for they merely gave a scream, which was followed by laughter as they skipped lightly to the ground. The author of this little tour de force was evidently the worthy farmer himself : a stalwart son of Anak, who, proud of his feat, threw the reins to a man—half ostler, half waiter—who had come out in time to witness the performance and emphasise it by his applause.

"Eh bien, papa ! allons boire un coup," cried mademoiselle, as she seized her father's arm and entered the inn, dutifully followed by madame la mère.

We apologise to the reader for the want of refinement in the young lady's exclamation, but as a faithful historian we can only record the words as we heard them. Moreover, they were an indication of her character, which would be misrepresented by being softened. The reader will be able exactly to match the young lady with the phrase. The inn swallowed them up, and we saw them no more.

Immediately after this, we ourselves fell into grief. The road, we have said, was dark as Erebus. Since the mature age of ten, we have suffered from what is called night blindness : that is, an inability to see anything in the dark. We are aware that this sounds either a very Irish sentence, or a very simple assertion ; and that most people would declare that to be blind in the dark is a very general experience. It is by no means so. There are many people who, like the writer, may possess very strong sight by day, yet are almost blind at night. Oculists may explain the mystery ; we cannot. Constantly we have fallen into trouble through this peculiarity of vision—or want of vision ; once were saved from drowning by a brother's presence.

H. C., who has cat's eyes in the dark, promised to pilot me—as he has many a time piloted me before ; and began his performance

by landing me in a deposit of lime half a yard high. He pretended not to have seen it, but from the periodical bursts of laughter that came from him as he surveyed my deplorable appearance, I doubted the assertion. It was evidently an excellent joke, not at his own expense. It is, however, useless to preach without practising, and I therefore took it philosophically, and pretended to enjoy it also. I confess that if I never felt a hypocrite before, I felt one then.

As we went on, the houses grew fewer and further between; more curious and countrified. One of these was a blacksmith's forge, and as the worthy smithy brought his brawny arm down upon the anvil, the metal rang out upon the night air and the sparks flew upwards. The flames of the forge played upon his face, whilst a young urchin, black as a chimney sweeper, blew the bellows. The man's voice kept rhythm to his strokes in one of the songs of the people. He himself looked worthy of Vulcan, and the scene was fitted for Pandemonium. Why are forges always so interesting? Is it because they are remnants of a barbarous and bygone age—almost the only things that have been in any way handed down to us from a period which seems remote as the Flood, or the Creation, or any other event sufficiently far off to appear to belong to another state of existence and another world?

Beyond the forge was a house, small and low; its walls seemed three feet thick, and it appeared to possess just a but and a ben, as they say in Scotland. In the wall there was a hole about two feet square, open to the elements, without window, without other protection than an outside green shutter, which apparently was never closed, so stiff and rude and rusty was the iron that fastened it to its place.

Framed as it were by this hole in the wall was an old man sitting on a stool within the but—or the ben: I know not how, in Scotland, they distinguish the one from the other. He was cobbling shoes, this patriarch, and was a direct contrast to the smithy, the sound of whose voice and anvil had very distinctly followed us. The cobbler was small and delicate, with pale, refined features. Long white locks fell over a high brow, and over his stooping shoulders. He might have been a genius, this mender of shoes. There was the musical blacksmith, here the poetical cobbler. The one might compose verses, the other set them to melody. He looked nearly a hundred, and probably had seen in a long life the "weight and woe of his errand;" the "much tribulation" all must more or less pass through in their strange, mysterious earthly pilgrimage. His white locks, and, above all, a certain resigned expression, which only comes of long years of care manfully battled with, sufficiently testified to the nature of his past. What his particular cross had been, the face would not tell. Perhaps a shrew of a wife, who had lived all her allotted years and beyond them; perhaps a wife who, the light of his eyes, the loadstar of his heart, had died young and left him to

sadness and solitude—for fate thus deals out her contrary and perplexing measures; we see it every day, and every day we wonder; but all we can do is to live on, and possess our souls in patience, and place our faith in the wisdom of the Unseen. We must not attempt to unravel the mysteries of life.

Or the cobbler of Dreux may have lost his children, and, like Rachel, wept through long years because they were not. Or he may have had a long fight with poverty, which perhaps is a trouble that touches the heart least, yet is hardest of all to bear.

Whatever the cross may have been, there he still was. Probably it had passed away; for extreme old age is resigned. The world is over, the future is all—the strange, unknown future. The long, solitary journey is about to be undertaken. And the cross is then often removed; for life being nearly over, the discipline necessary for earlier years is necessary no longer. No one believes that trouble is sent for any other purpose than discipline.

He worked by the light of a bright lamp, which played upon his face and brought it out in strong relief; well-shaped, clear-cut features, with the wrinkles of age upon cheek and brow, but none of the marks invariably sown by an ill-spent life.

We looked through the hole, and his face was framed within, and ours, as he lifted his head from his work, was framed without. The lamp-light revealed us distinctly. He looked surprised, but only for a moment. His thoughts had evidently been very far off. The old live in the past; their happiness is in retrospection, recollection; the days that have been; their lost youth, lost loves. What have they to do with the present, whose silver cord is loosening, whose pitcher is taking its last journey to the fountain?

He looked up and saw us. And he must have found that our gaze was one of interest, not merely of curiosity; must have seen in our expression a little of the touch of nature, the bond of sympathy “which makes the whole world kin;” for he did not resent our intrusion, but accepted our visit.

“Messieurs are abroad late to-night. It is dark and lonesome.”

“We are travellers,” we explained; “birds of passage, taking Dreux on our way to Chartres. We are going up the hill to try and get into the Royal Chapel.”

“Then you will not succeed,” was the consoling reply. “You will have your trouble for your pains. The gates are closed.”

“But there is no doubt a concierge?”

“A very dragon,” he returned; and by his expression we began to think that his particular cross might have been the long-lived shrew, not the broken dream of short-lived happiness. “A very dragon, as ruthless as fate, as silent as the Delphic Oracle. She will not open the gates for you. She would not open them for the President of the Republic.”

We were surprised to hear this old shoemaker quoting mythology

and wondered whether he had always been a maker and mender of shoes. But we had no time to enter into the past ; it would probably have been opening the flood-gates of a mighty torrent of recollections. This we would reserve for some possible future visit to Dreux. But we did venture upon a personal remark.

"You seem aged for that sort of work," we observed. "It is almost time you rested from your labours."

"The rest will come soon enough," he replied, with a smile and a dreamy look. "I am eighty-eight years old. People talk of their jubilee, but I have been at my work for seventy-five years. And I have never known want of work ; have never had to beg or borrow ; Heaven has been good to me. When I can work no longer I shall know that the rest has come. It will then be time to put away, and sing the vesper hymn of my life."

We somehow felt rebuked. Here was so much faith and gratitude ; so much contentment with so little to satisfy it. It was a lesson learned by the wayside, and was worth the learning.

We left him to his work, his lamp, his recollections, and went on our way. The houses grew fewer, the road darker. Presently we entered a grove of trees, sombre and mysterious. Utter silence reigned. We were beyond the reach of the harmonious blacksmith ; and Dreux, now quite far off, was too quiet a town to send forth the rush and roar of life indulged in by greater cities. It was too dark even for shadows. Not a breath of air stirred the branches of the straight trees so thickly planted together. Everything, even the voices of nature, seemed buried in profound slumber. If there were ghosts lurking about, it was too dark to see them. Perhaps this very grove had been haunted by Druids in the days gone by, and *their* shades might have been flitting about it now ; holding revelry amongst the trees, or waiting to show themselves to such wayfarers as had the gift of second sight.

Evidently we had not the gift, for we saw none. But we distinctly felt their influence. The moment we entered the grove we fell under a spell ; a strange impression took possession of us ; a cold and creepy feeling ; a sense of the presence of the mysterious, the supernatural, the invisible to mortal eye. Here, certainly, Druids must have worshipped, and we tried to find traces of the strange menhirs they have left behind them.

We saw nothing, and presently we passed out of the grove and the uncanny influence. The pure, dark sky of heaven was above us. The stars flashed and scintillated. We were at the end of our pilgrimage. Great gates, closed and barred, stood before us. To be or not to be ? Should we conquer the dragon ?

In the darkness we had to grope for the bell ; we could not see it. We found it ; and a peal went forth upon the night air and awoke the echoes of the mysterious grove. Silence. Then suddenly, uprising like a Jack-in-the-box, and inspiring us almost with terror, a figure

seemed to spring up from nowhere on to the roof of a little lodge on the left, and the voice of the dragon was heard.

"What do you want?" it said, very sternly and abruptly.

"We want to see the chapel," we replied, in the sweetest tones at our command.

"Impossible," was the answer. "No one is admitted after dark. The gates are closed."

"But we want you to open them for us. You must make us the one exception to your rule. There is no rule without an exception, you know."

Then suddenly there was a step forward, and a female head bent over the roof. It was quite a Romeo and Juliet scene, H. C. whispered—and I was only too happy that he should play Montague to such a Capulet.

"Who has the temerity to make such a request?" asked this Juliet, in apparently the extreme of wrath. "Who bids me unbar the gates, as though he were a monarch of the House I acknowledge?"

"We are not monarchs," we humbly replied. "But we admire and respect your House. We recognise the divine right of kings; we believe in hereditary monarchy. We should not wonder if your House —"

"Do you think it will ever reign again?" The dragon's voice trembled as she asked the question. We felt we were about to conquer. But our answer must be oracular.

"It may well be," we replied. "Greater wonders are seen every day. Justice is sometimes delayed, but triumphs in the end. Those who live longest see most. We are travellers. This is our first visit to Dreux; it may be our last. We should be disconsolate if we did not pay our respects to the tomb of your House. It is in your power to admit us."

There was a deep sigh: a murmured "If I thought they would reign again I should die happy;" a head suddenly withdrawn; another interval of silence; and then the great gate swung open, we passed within, and the gate closed behind us. There stood the dragon, a bright lamp in hand, smiling and amiable; a dragon no longer.

"You are strange people," she said. "You have mesmerised me. I do not know what your influence is, but I feel bound to obey you. I have never done this for anyone before; I shall never do it for anyone again. Follow me."

And we followed this feminine Diogenes. Her step was light, her carriage was noble. Her lamp gleamed out weirdly in the darkness, faintly lighting up the trees and shrubs about us; casting ghostly shadows around.

It was a strange experience, and we felt curiously about it. But it possessed sufficient of the unusual to make it interesting; was tinged with a romance that redeemed it altogether from the commonplace,

and raised in one the spirit of adventure. There was, indeed, nothing commonplace about Dreux from beginning to end, as we saw it that night.

We passed down the walks and between sombre avenues, following our guide. Now she held high her lamp, casting fitful gleams upon path and trees, and we could have fancied her some ancient vestal virgin on her way to replenish the sacred fires; for dragon as she might be in name and reputation, she was soft and feminine and comely in appearance. From the tower-roof, she had looked portentous, gigantic, threatening; a very gorgon of custodians. We now perceived our error; the obscurity of the night had exaggerated her outlines, as it exaggerates the outlines of cathedrals and mountains, and other majestic objects of art or nature.

If she was a vestal virgin, here was the temple. For suddenly there loomed before us a building, of which we could see nothing but the form. We could not judge of its architecture, which is said to be a mixture of many schools, a pure example of none. Nevertheless, the building looked imposing, and the cupola surmounting it was clearly outlined against the dark sky.

A solemn silence reigned—the silence of the dead. Our guide herself ceased speaking, and evidently felt on hallowed ground. She stood a moment before the great door, then quietly inserted her key, and the door swung noiselessly back upon its hinges. She went before us, carrying the lamp, which dimly lighted up the interior and cast ghostly shadows upon the walls. It seemed richly decorated, and by daylight we could fancy it ornamented to gorgeousness. It is in the form of a Greek Cross; the rotunda is eighty feet high, and the cupola above it forty-three feet in diameter.

"Behold your wish," said our Slave of the Lamp, with a dignity that became the place and the occasion. "You are in the Royal Chapel. It is dedicated to St. Louis. Never before has friend or foe trodden these flags at night under my guidance. You gaze upon a scene unknown to mortal eyes in its present aspect—or I am mistaken."

It was certainly weird enough for the most ghost-loving imagination, and we felt repaid for all our pains and perseverance. It was something, also, to have subdued this dragon.

"Did Louis Philippe found the chapel?" we asked.

"No; it was founded by the old Duchess of Orleans; she lies there," pointing to the apse on the left of the altar; "close to Madame Adélaïde. The statue to her memory is by Barre. The most beautiful statue of all is the Angel of Resignation, sculptured by the Princess Marie of Orleans, afterwards Duchess of Wurtemberg. She too lies there, but on the right, close to Louis Philippe and Marie Amélie, his consort. She was as accomplished as she was good and lovely. It is thought to be finer than her Jeanne d'Arc."

It was certainly very beautiful. As the lamp-light played upon it

and threw up its proportions and its purity in the surrounding gloom, it made a most effective picture. One could almost have fancied it an angel turned to stone; guarding, in motionless silence, the Royal Mausoleum until the day-dawn and the day-star rose upon the world for the last time, and time itself passed into eternity.

In the chapel dedicated to the Virgin, our guide pointed out some rich carving and pendants from the roof, which we could very faintly discern. The windows were of course invisible.

"They are rich and beautiful," she remarked, "though modern. They are the best that Sèvres could produce. It is nearly all due to the King, Louis Philippe, and was designed to replace one destroyed at the Revolution. He was wise. In Paris nothing is safe. Here they rest in peace; the mob will not reach them; even Napoleon III., when he confiscated the possessions of the House of Orleans, spared their tomb. And now it is *his* turn, and he himself lies in a foreign land. Have you seen his mausoleum? I hear that it is magnificent."

Only H. C. had visited the new tomb at Farningham, and declared it to be of great beauty.

"Well, I am not jealous," returned our singular but loyal guide. "I wish him no harm. I think he did good to France for the time being: he would have done more had they allowed him. At least he had not the lives of a countless multitude upon his soul, like the first Napoleon, whom forsooth they call GREAT. You did not think him great, messieurs?"

We could not parley with conscience, and confessed that we thought him very much so.

"Ah, well! we all have our ideas of greatness. For my part I hate wars and rumours of wars, and all those who make them. I have reason. I lost many relatives and friends in battle. The very sound of the cannon fills me with terror. And you have heard them call me a dragon," she comically added, in quite a tone of appeal and remonstrance.

"You are not likely to be much tried by it here," we remarked.

"No. Dreux has seen its trouble and gone through its wars, but they are over. The vultures have changed their scenes of carnage. Our Royal people here rest in peace."

"You are very loyal to them," we observed.

"I would shed my blood for them," replied this faithful geni. "I and mine have known them for generations. It is my ambition and my dream to see them once more in power. Our young Duke has the elements in him of a great king, if only the foolish and frivolous and fickle French nation can be brought to see it."

We were verging on a political discussion; and much as we should have liked to draw out our dragon, we had no time for argument. Besides, they are like squibs in their temperaments, these people; a spark in the shape of a misplaced word may set them blazing. And here we felt ourselves at the mercy of our geni. We were her

prisoners. The great outer gates had closed upon us : a few steps and the chapel doors might roll to on their hinges, and leave us victims to a living tomb : until we became cold and lifeless as the Angel of Resignation near which we were standing.

It was time to leave, moreover. We turned, and again she led the way outward, bearing high her lamp. We formed a singular little procession. It was almost a solemn adventure, made mysterious by the shadows of night. We could only faintly realise the building, but at least we had stood within it. If one day we should see it again when the sun is in its meridian, we shall fancy that we never saw it before. It will wear a new aspect : the darkness of the interior will have given place to light seen through gorgeous coloured glass ; sunbeams will dye walls and pavement with rainbow hues : perhaps crown the head and brow of the Angel of Resignation with a golden aureole.

We passed out into the night. The trees about us were stirred with a faint breeze ; a gentle murmur seemed to call into question this unusual intrusion. As we went round, the town lay at our feet. Lights flashed and glimmered ; we faintly made out the outlines of the great church of St. Peter's. But it was all quiet and silent ; apparently a sleeping world. No buzz of life and movement reached us. The great plains lay stretched and invisible under the dark canopy of heaven. Far, far away we saw the faint glimmering of two lights, small as stars. Were they the lamps of our advancing train ? For our own sakes we hoped not.

"The great plains of Dreux," exclaimed our geni, solemnly waving her hand around. "The plains where the *Journée de Dreux* was lost and won, and Catholics and Huguenots fought and slew each other like wild beasts rather than Christians. I have stood here at sunset, and watched the glow spreading itself over the plain, and fancied it to be the life-blood of dying men poured out upon the field of battle. I have imagined the groans of the wounded, the cry of the dying, the despair of the vanquished, the savage triumph of the conquerors. And I have prayed Heaven with all my heart and soul to hasten the time when wars shall cease. For if I had a son, and he fell in conscription and died in battle, his loss would then and there be borne in upon me, and his last hour would be mine also."

A singular character, this woman ; a strange, mystical temperament evidently ; a woman capable, no doubt, of highest feats of heroism ; it might be the desperate feat of a Charlotte Corday, or the fanatical heroism of a Jeanne d'Arc ; or, possibly, the more difficult path of the sustained effort of a quiet, life-long, self-sacrificing vocation.

"And now I will tell you a secret," she added in a different tone, in which we detected a sound of humour. "You think I am the dragon. I am not the dragon. The dragon has gone away for three days. I am only a friend of the dragon ; like yourselves a bird of passage, whom Dreux knows not, though I have occasionally been

here for a day or two's repose on my way to busier scenes. Had the dragon been here you would not have been admitted. She is my friend, but she is as hard as steel; you could no more turn her than you can turn the tide. But when you pleaded in those dulcet tones"—we bowed low—"I had not the heart to refuse you. Where was the harm? We have both enjoyed our little visit and interview, and you have not had your walk in vain. And now you have only time to catch your train for Chartres; and I must dismiss you with my benediction."

Singular woman! Strange, interesting character! H. C., who spreads his favours broadcast upon the earth, and, like the Apostles of old, thinks everyone should possess all things in common, would have pressed a substantial remembrance upon her. I saw the gleam of gold flash in the lamplight. I think she understood by intuition his motive, and the largeness of his heart, for she was not offended.

"Nay," she remonstrated, with strange yet gentle dignity; "do not mistake me; spare your alms for those who are in need. It was not for that I admitted you. Do not spoil our little interview by thoughts of earthly gain. You betray sympathy in your tone and faces. I see that you are the friends, not the enemies of mankind: let me think of you as two friends to whom I have rendered a small service; whom perchance in the future I may come across at a time when I shall sorely need it returned. For life is full of strange encounters and coincidences, and greater marvels happen every day than that you and I should meet again. And now, farewell: and in your kindly thoughts, and sometimes in your prayers, remember the name of your guide."

"And that name?" we naturally asked.

She paused a moment; seemed taking counsel with herself, battling with some strange emotion. Then, appearing to take a sudden resolution, she spoke:

"Why should I not tell you? There is that in your face I would trust for ever. We are of those who read faces. You are passing away; you will keep my secret. Listen—and wonder."

She stooped and whispered a few words in our ear.

Astonishment took possession of us. We felt ourselves turn pale; a wave of emotion surged through us; we grasped the small and delicate hand that was held out to us, baring our head and bowing low.

"But how——" we began.

"Not a word," she interrupted; "not a question. Depart in peace. Do not forget me, or this night. If ever we should meet in the great world, remember that we are friends. Farewell."

We passed away from the presence of this strange and singular being. The door closed behind us, and we were alone with the night. We were as one in a dream. For a time we were both silent. We passed through the Druid-haunted grove, but forgot to look for shades. Our late singular experience and interview—above

all that last and wonderful disclosure—had taken possession of us. We would not have missed it for the world ; nay, far rather would have put up with the inconvenience of a night at Dreux.

But this was not to be our fate. We reached the railway station, and found we were a good quarter of an hour before our time ; and the porter had been true to his charge. He indeed did not refuse a remembrance at the prodigal hands of H. C., but this time it was silver, not gold.

The train came up ; we entered with our numerous packages, and steamed away.

And now, reader, I have an apology to offer thee. I had almost promised to show thee Chartres in this paper ; had thought to do so ; and behold the pen has run away with its subject, and has kept us lingering at Dreux. I have not even views to offer thee ; for being night we could not sketch. Moreover, I knew not that Dreux would prove a theme so long drawn out. We cannot even give thee sketches from memory, for it is the eleventh hour, and merciless printers have waxed impatient. Time is ended. I shall not even be treated to that doubtful compliment from amiable friends, who, had I been born conceited (which Heaven forbid), would long since have landed me in the sackcloth and ashes of humility. "We like your papers," say they, "*the pictures are so pretty !*" If they tried for a hundred years, could they find a more self-subduing, a more crushing speech ? By mere chance H. C. had sketched the town hall, and so with it I am able to strike the key-note of my paper ; but that is all. I have endeavoured to give you a few word pictures of scenes which occupied our two hours at Dreux ; a dark night's scenes which left a peculiarly vivid and pleasant, an unfading impression upon us ; but I feel only too acutely that *the other pictures are wanting*. If, reader, thou possessest neither the amiability of a saint nor the patience of Job—to which we have already alluded—in charity accord me what thou canst. There are such things as repentance in the present and amendment in the future. Of the one I am certain—I will endeavour to bring forth the other.

A SONG OF LIFE.

WHEN on the dimpled cheek of youth
 Health's blooming roses blow ;
 When songs of rapture, hope and truth
 From lips of beauty flow ;
 When youthful feet right gaily bound
 Where thorn nor tare appears,
 How joyously the days go round—
 The weeks, the months, the years.

The youth beholds with fearless eye
 The lofty hill of fame ;
 And hopes upon its summit high
 E'er long to carve his name !
 Joy thrills his heart—in every sound
 Fame's bugle call he hears ;
 And merrily the days go round—
 The weeks, the months, the years.

The lady of his love must prove
 A queen of beauty rare ;
 No vain coquette—but wise in love,
 And true as she is fair ;
 Amid the tender stars at night
 He sees her dear eyes shine,
 As with a trusting, fond delight
 He worships at her shrine.

But when the furrowed cheek of age
 Care's hollow wrinkles show,
 The old man turns his life's last page
 With trembling hand and slow ;
 Dark lower the skies—in every sound
 Death's mournful dirge he hears,
 And wearily the days go round—
 The weeks, the months, the years.

The old man sees through tear-blurred eye
 The lofty hill of fame,
 Where cherished hopes in ruin lie,
 Where none may mark his name ;
 One little, lonely, nameless mound
 At every step appears,
 As mournfully the days go round,
 The weeks, the months, the years.

The lady of his love, alas,
 Hath closed her weary eyes,
 With but one tiny tuft of grass
 To show him where she lies ;
 "Old wife of mine," he whispers low,
 "Above thy grave I see
 The star of faith, whose beams I know
 Shall guide me soon to thee."

FANNY FORRESTER.

THE LOVELY WIDOW.

THE funeral was over. Very childish-looking was the figure of the widow, whose golden hair resisted the stern efforts made that day to brush its soft rings into straight and severe lines. The baby sweetness of her large blue eyes was veiled by drooping lids and dark, curling lashes, as she sat silent and quiet in the dining-room of a well-furnished house, and listened while the sharp, business-like voice of the lawyer announced that all the property the deceased Edward Grant died possessed of was left for the sole and undisputed use of "his dear wife Florence Adelaide."

Opposite the window sat the bolt upright figure of the dead man's mother, a strong-minded woman anyone could see, and as capable a manager of business as most men. She was turned seventy, but might pass for fifty-five anywhere. She steadily regarded the lawyer while he read, and when he had finished adjusted her spectacles more firmly, and looked at her daughter-in-law; the latter simply thanked the lawyer for his explanations, begged him to partake of refreshment, and then in subdued quietness left the room, two servants following her respectfully.

Alone with the old lady, the lawyer helped himself to a large glass of port and a biscuit, and between the sips and munches deplored in short, brisk sentences the sudden demise of his excellent client, and the uncertainty of human life generally.

"Did you make that will, Mr. Phipps?" asked old Mrs. Grant, abruptly.

"I did, madam; indeed, I may say that I have transacted all legal business for your lamented son for five-and-twenty years."

"I know that. Edward wasn't a man to change, and a more sensible man than he was until he was five-and-forty never lived."

"Five and forty? Let me see; he was that some ten months ago."

"He was; and then he fell in love with the doll face of a governess, and made a fool of himself," snapped the old lady, taking off her spectacles and rubbing them vigorously.

"Well, well, madam," said the lawyer, shaking his head with an indulgent smile as he poured out another glass of wine, "we all have our weak moments; and, by jove! Mrs. Edward would excuse a good deal of folly—lovely creature!"

"Bah! you're all alike!" cried Mrs. Grant, viciously. "Now tell me, can that girl make ducks and drakes of all my poor son's property if she chooses?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Everything is hers—those are the terms of the will. We will hope, however, that with so capable an adviser as yourself, the charming young widow will manage well and comfortably. Good-morning, madam! My train starts ten minutes hence, and business awaits me. Always happy to be of service to any of my late client's family."

So he bowed himself off, and Mrs. Grant put the wine away in an old-fashioned cellaret. This she locked, and removed the bunch of keys to a basket on the table. Then she stood and looked round at the massive old furniture, soliloquising.

"As good now as it was in his father's time, and valuable. I've nothing like it in my house. Hope Florence will look after things—and of course she can't live here alone. Humph!"

With this audible grunt, the erect old lady strode into the hall, which was cold and gloomy. On the opposite side was the drawing-room door, which she opened, and found the room fireless and empty; the blinds not yet drawn up.

"Florence is in her room, I suppose," she thought, standing irresolute. "Shall I go to her? Perhaps better not. There's never been much feeling between us, though I'd be willing to overlook that now," and she rang the bell.

With painfully hushed footsteps—for the sense of death still lingered in the house—the parlour-maid answered the summons.

"I'm going home now, Janet; will you ask your mistress if I shall come up to her, or whether she'd rather see me to-morrow?"

"Yes, ma'am."

In a minute Janet fluttered back.

"Please, ma'am, my mistress says she would be glad to see you in the morning."

"Very well—bring my umbrella and cloak, Janet; it rains a little now, I see."

And the tall old lady walked forth, and soon reached a small neat house, surrounded by a prim suburban garden, where a servant, nearly as old as herself, must have been on the watch, for the door was held open as she passed in at the gate.

Silently and kindly the cloak was removed, and then Maria followed her mistress into the neat, prim drawing-room, where a bright fire burned.

"You'll be liking a cup of tea, ma'am, and it's ready for you."

"Yes, Maria; a cup of tea."

Old Mrs. Grant untied her bonnet strings, took off a knitted wrapper, and seated herself in a formal, high-backed arm-chair, resting her withered hands on the arms, and looking straight and steady at the fire. Maria brought the tea and a pair of slippers. These she put on for her mistress, and then watched her drink the tea in silence.

At last she spoke.

"Well, ma'am, it's all over then—I watched them pass to the cemetery."

Mrs. Grant bowed her head.

"Yes, it's over. They managed very well; everything quiet and decent, as *he* had wished it." And the old eyes tried to look as steady at the fire as before.

"Oh, ma'am, but it has been a bitter day for you that saw him buried!" said the servant, in sympathising earnestness.

The tender words broke down the mother's stern self-restraint. She wept long, and moaned the name of her son.

Edward Grant had been a very uninteresting person to the world at large. A plain man of middle age, sufficiently well to do as a merchant to keep up the substantial respectability in which his father had lived before him, and with no desire for any of the show and luxury in which his neighbours indulged—many of them poorer than he. To his mother he had been everything, for she had no other child, and Maria had nursed him as an infant, scolded him as a schoolboy, and worshipped him all his life. To both these women the day when he arrived from Paris, bringing with him a lovely bride, of whom they had heard nothing, was remembered as the blackest in their calendar. It was Edward Grant's one grand error in his mother's eyes. She could have welcomed a wife of her own choosing, but this one of his found no favour in her eyes. It took but a few days to remove from the large house which had been her husband's, and to settle in a cottage—firm refusal to share her son's home being given. With her retired Maria, in grim contempt of the follies of men. And, after all, he had not lived a year with his young wife when death came!

So the two old women wept together over the memory of the dead man, and Maria heard that his will left everything to his wife.

"Not that I wanted anything," said the mother, amid her tears; "I've enough and to spare; but there's no mention of me! Maybe I was too hard on them."

Maria glowered at the fire, and said, emphatically:

"She's a deep one! I always said it!"

II.

"FLORENCE," the old lady was saying, nervously, "we have not been much to each other—but he we both loved is gone, and I'd be glad to help you if I could."

The lovely face showed no signs of desire to reciprocate. The deep blue eyes had a light in them that made them almost black.

"You are very good—but there is nothing you can do for me." Old Mrs. Grant winced.

"You can't forgive me yet, but there are things I might do for you. This large house and furniture need care, and so young a widow cannot live alone."

"I don't intend to live alone. I am going to my friends abroad," announced the widow.

"Abroad!" cried the old lady, aghast. "Why should you go abroad, and you so comfortably—so generously left?" For in Mrs. Grant's eyes, going abroad to live meant being too poor to exist respectably in England.

Florence waited a second, and then said in concentrated, deliberate tones:

"I have never been happy here. I hate the place, the house, the furniture. I am going to sell the house and furniture."

Mrs. Grant groaned, and sat erect.

"Florence, you can think of selling what my Edward's father worked for! You cannot have loved your husband!"

Firmly the lovely blue eyes met hers.

"You are right. I did not love my husband, and he knew that when he married me."

The old lady rose to go, nervously clutching her cloak together as she spoke.

"Farewell, then. If you did not deceive him, I can forgive you; but from my heart I pity him. And he my only son."

A few days after the big house was shut up, and the widow went forth, leaving instructions with her lawyer to sell up the property.

III.

It is a year later, and we find ourselves in a charming country mansion, where a blooming young matron has entered the dining-room before any of her guests have appeared for breakfast. Mrs. Lovell smiles as she looks at the long rows of cups she will presently be filling, for she loves a full house—and especially in the hunting-season, when the only alloy to her pleasure is the fear that her young husband may meet with an accident. To-day, too, her only brother, Captain Melville, who arrived from the Continent late the night before, will be one of the party.

Gradually the ladies dropped in—two of them in riding habits—and then the men looked pleasantly at the dainty table and plentiful sideboard, and conversed in jerks amid the pleasures of eating.

"Not a scrap of frost," said Mrs. Lovell, brightly. "How you riders will enjoy it. Where is the meet, Tom?"

"At Elversly," said her husband—"quite a safe ride, I assure you."

"No doubt. You ought to be grateful for my anxiety."

"Yes," said Kate Lee, one of the riders; "look at Major Dale."

"No, don't look at me!" observed that gentleman, who entered at the moment. "I don't think I could stand it if you all looked at me!"

"I was only contrasting your fate with Mr. Lovell's," pursued Kate, coolly; "and was going to say no one cared whether you rode

hard or not!" but she flushed as the tall, fair-bearded man answered:

"Oh, don't they? that's all you know about it! I'll convince you some day, when I'm not so hungry as I am now."

"Is Archie down yet? No, I see he isn't!" said Mrs. Lovell. "He can't mean to ride this morning."

"I'm so sorry," cried the curly-haired eldest boy, aged seven, "for I'm going—and Uncle Archie's such fun."

"Never mind, Tommy!" said Kate, "I'm going also."

"You're no good, Kate, because I mean to ride at everything."

"Bravo! Tommy, but will the Shetland do it?" asked Major Dale.

"Of course," replied Tommy, contemptuously.

Just as the hunting party prepared to start, Archie Melville sauntered in.

"Going to ride?" asked his brother-in-law, hastily collecting some small articles in the way of flasks, etc., for his friends.

"No. I shall stay at home and bother Jennie."

"Welcome," said Mrs. Lovell, laughing. "Now, my friends, you ought to start. Do be careful, Tom," in a whisper.

"I will, dear—Tommy and I will keep together," laughed her lord.

By the time Captain Melville had finished breakfast, his sister was disengaged to follow him to a pretty morning-room, where he sank in a low wicker-work lounge and declared himself content with the world. He had, however, an evident purpose in view, as his sister, who knew him thoroughly, soon divined.

After a few minutes' chat on indifferent subjects, Archie said:

"By the way, don't you remember that pretty Madame de Crespigny?"

"Yes," said Jennie; "she was a distant cousin of our mother's, and married a Frenchman—what about her?"

"Nothing much about her, for she is dead and her husband too; but they lost all their money, and their only daughter, named Florence—"

"Mamma's name," interrupted Jennie, gently.

"Yes, I thought of that," responded Archie, with a look of soft remembrance towards his sister. "Well, this poor girl was sixteen when they died, and went as nursery governess to an English family. Three years after she married an English merchant, who died a year ago."

"Poor thing!" said Jennie.

"Well, he left her provided for—but she had no friends in England, and I met her in Paris, where she resides with an unlovely old maiden aunt, a sister of her father's."

"Dear me! And was she nice, Archie?" asked Jennie, demurely.

"Oh, fairly. But, Jennie, I was thinking it would be kind of you if you asked her on a little visit here."

"Oh!" said Jennie, and her pretty mouth twitched roguishly. "So *that's* why you did not go hunting this morning?"

"Stuff, Jennie," said Archie, rising impatiently; "it's nothing to me. Only as there *is* a sort of connection with our family——"

"Oh, but there's a much nearer connection with old Mrs. Todd and her two fat daughters—you never asked me to invite *them*!" cried Jennie, provokingly.

"Very well—I don't care," said Archie shrugging his shoulders. "Only I thought you might oblige me, as I've met Mrs. Grant and mentioned you to her."

"All right, Archie," said Jennie, laughing, "it shall be done." She seated herself at the writing-table, obtained particulars, wrote a pretty note, and was rewarded by a brotherly embrace.

A few days later a young Oxford student, who was idling a few days at Lovell Park, tumbled headlong into the billiard-room with a face full of news. It was the hour before dressing for dinner.

"The carriage has just come from the station, and there's the loveliest girl in it you ever saw!"

"That *you* ever saw, you mean, Neal!" responded Major Dale, calmly continuing his game; "for how can you tell what lovely girls *I* may have seen?"

"Oh, you never think anyone pretty!" said the youth impatiently; "but anyone else would call this girl a beauty. Who is she, Captain Melville?"

"I must see her before answering," said Archie, lighting a fresh cigar. "I didn't know any girls were expected."

The fever of youth could not be calmed, and Tom Neal ran off to where some of the ladies were assembled—but not the new arrival. There, however, he learnt that the stranger was a widow, a Mrs. Grant, and darted back to the billiard-room to tell his success.

"Oh, our cousin, Mrs. Grant," said Archie, trying to look unconscious, but missing a good stroke with the effort.

"Man! you've lost it!" cried Major Dale, disappointedly. "I wish, Neal, you'd admire your girls and widows without spoiling a good game." And just then the dressing-bell sounded, and all wandered away to attire for the comforts of the evening. In a corridor Archie met his sister coming from her guest's room.

"Archie, she's lovely! I don't wonder you wanted to see her again!"

"Nonsense, Jennie!" But he looked pleased, nevertheless.

When Mrs. Edward Grant came down to dinner she created a sensation. The extreme childish innocence of her great beauty made its chief attraction. A soft white tulle edition of a widow's cap lay lightly on the silken rings of bright gold hair which curled and twisted round her pretty head, and the picture attained was that of a lovely child who was playing at widowhood! Everyone was struck with her, and the young Oxonian was triumphant.

Several ladies depreciated Mrs. Grant behind their fans, but one, Kate Lee, who had been the beauty till the widow came, calmly declared in an undertone to her sister :

"That sort of thing is unapproachable ! How exquisitely her black dress fits !"

It was soon clear to men and women alike that their hostess's brother was hopelessly in love ; and there was such a tender, appealing look in the lovely face, no one wondered. Only Major Dale, who was known to be cynical, refrained from expressing approval. In fact, it seemed as if he regretted his friend's infatuation, and would have saved him from pursuing it if he could. However, sometimes Cupid comes with slow and sure footsteps, at others in such certain leaps there is no time to think or check the tide ; and before a week of Mrs. Grant's visit was over, Captain Melville had proposed and been accepted, although it was but a year since the lamented Mr. Grant had died.

The widow's cap was discarded, and her short golden hair regained its freedom. Also, a dove-coloured silk replaced her mourning on the evening when the engagement was made known. Major Dale looked on while others admired, and only asked Kate Lee drily if "widows always brought such a convenient change of garments with them ?"

"I don't know much about widows," said Kate, calmly ; "but very few are so fair as this one."

It was not many days before Archie confided to Major Dale that he had begged for an early wedding-day, and that the Lovells had arranged for the event to take place at their house a few days after Christmas. He concluded by asking him to be best man on the occasion.

"Very well ; with pleasure," said Major Dale, but his face looked less satisfied than his words sounded.

"Come and spend your Christmas with us," said Mr. Lovell, genially.

"I would gladly," said Major Dale, "but I am expecting a man I used to know years ago to stay with me. He has been abroad a couple of years, and has just come into a baronetcy."

"Bring him, too." And that settled the matter.

IV.

THREE days before Christmas, and amid all the merriment and confusion of a country mansion at that time, the lovely widow continued to amass and to pack an elaborate trousseau. In vain Archie pleaded that it would really be possible to purchase garments at some future day in the course of her life ; still the heaps of clothing increased as if a siege were impending, and Mrs. Grant only shook her head smilingly, and promised her dejected intended the devotion

of all her time when once the important question of clothes was settled. She was reclining in a lounge, partaking of five o'clock tea with Mrs. Lovell and some other ladies, when Mr. Lovell entered.

"Dale has just come, and brought his friend."

"Oh," said Mrs. Lovell, rising hospitably, to be ready to welcome her guests. "What is the friend's name, dear?"

"Sir Arthur Belmont."

"Dear me, Mrs. Grant!" cried a stout, fussy lady; "how did you manage it? The cup broken, and the tea all over your lovely gown!"

"Excuse me—so very awkward—that lovely cup!" murmured Mrs. Grant, hurriedly getting up.

"Never mind the cup, Florence," said Mrs. Lovell, magnanimously, for it was one of a valuable set; "but let us ring for your maid to save the gown."

"No, no; let me run away for a few minutes." And she gracefully escaped at one door as Major Dale and Sir Arthur Belmont entered at the other.

Just before dinner, Archie met Mrs. Grant's maid running down a passage, with a note in her hand. Florence often sent him billet-doux, and he stopped hesitatingly.

"Were you coming to me, Drew?"

"No, sir, only to one of the ladies," said Drew, smiling.

He passed on, and when Drew had watched him out of sight, she went swiftly towards the room prepared for Sir Arthur Belmont. The door was ajar, and peeping in, Drew saw the room was empty. She entered quickly, and laid her note on the dressing-table, escaping, as she thought, unseen.

That evening, when the party assembled for dinner, Major Dale's eyes watched keenly the introduction between Sir Arthur Belmont and the fair widow.

The baronet was a much shorter man than Captain Melville, and not nearly so good-looking. His face was dark, the brow lowering and eyes deep-set. There was considerable power in the countenance, and a dogged resolution which would overcome most obstacles. When he was introduced to Mrs. Grant, his brow was grave and unconcerned, and he speedily returned to a conversation with his host. The widow herself looked bewilderingly lovely, graceful and unconscious, and smiled delightfully into the eyes of her fiancé when he presented her with the choicest flower of which he had robbed his sister's conservatory. Archie looked beamingly handsome, and his natural gaiety was heightened by the influence of the near approach of his marriage. To his mind everything that mortal man could wish for lay within his reach.

Major Dale was puzzled and watchful. He had been Archie's schoolfellow and friend through life, and things were going in a way to cause grave doubts and conjectures. His room adjoined Sir Arthur

Belmont's, and he had been writing a letter with the door of communication open when Mrs. Grant's maid entered and laid the note on the table. The subsequent meeting in the drawing-room had puzzled him.

A thoroughly English Christmas was celebrated, Mr. Lovell having invited a number of relatives to dinner besides the guests in the house. The children made noise enough to show they were enjoying a season devoted to their pleasure, and everyone made merry. Under cover of the general excitement, the occasionally pre-occupied and anxious manner of the bride was not noticed.

At last the day before the wedding came. At breakfast the guests found their letters, and Sir Arthur Belmont announced that his conveyed a necessity for immediate departure to town. There were polite regrets of course, but Major Dale felt instinctively glad. Mrs. Grant was not down at breakfast, and directly after the baronet departed.

Archie amused himself by writing large labels for Florence's innumerable packages, addressing them to "Mrs. Melville, Langham Hotel," and then wandered aimlessly about amid the general confusion. Mrs. Grant came down to dinner, after a severe day's work, she said, which accounted for her pale cheeks and weary manner.

"Good-bye, then, till to-morrow," said Archie, bending his handsome head to claim a lover's privilege.

"Good-bye, Archie."

The words were murmured by pale lips, and Mrs. Grant shivered—upon which Archie tenderly wrapped her shawl round her, and stood to watch her ascend the broad staircase with a gaze of passionate admiration.

There was a cold and uncomfortable confusion at the breakfast-table next morning. Mrs. Lovell had breakfasted early in her room, and so three pretty bridesmaids—who were shivering at the thought of the damp country church—tried to make the table as cheerful as usual, and failed. Archie looked in, having satisfied himself, by questioning Drew, that the luggage was all ready. When the hundredth opening of his watch assured him that in half-an-hour the carriages would be at the door, he bethought him of a message he had to send to Florence, and rapidly ascended the stairs. At the top, looking white and frightened, stood his sister Jennie, in close, agitated conversation with Major Dale, whose face was set and stern. Both started as Archie approached.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, Archie, I don't know—I can't think!" cried Jennie, clasping her hands, and tears pouring down her cheeks.

"Tell me at once!" exclaimed Archie, fiercely; "is Florence ill?" And not waiting for an answer, he dashed on towards her room. Major Dale followed him quickly, and they found the door locked.

"The balcony!" said Archie, as he swiftly sped through his sister's

boudoir, out on to the balcony, and thence to the window of Florence's room. It was unfastened, and the room empty. Everything was in confusion, but on the table lay a letter Florence had sat up late to write, and addressed to Captain Melville. He tore it open, and found that his bride had fled to become the wife of the rich baronet, who had been a poor younger son in the family where she had been governess, and who had been her lover in those old days before she married Mr. Grant.

"Forgive me, Archie, if you can. I loved him when I was only sixteen, but we were both poor, and he dared not offend his parents by marrying a governess. When I saw him again, I knew no other marriage was possible for me, and had not courage to tell you—"

"So that is done!" said Archie, with bitter calm.

"Archie," said Major Dale, with fervent sympathy, "it is a horrible affair now—but, mark my words, you are saved from marrying the most heartless woman who ever wore an angel's face! *If Belmont had not become a rich man*—and she only heard of his accession to his poor brother's property since her visit here—Mrs. Grant would have married you."

Jennie stole in with awed face and tearful anxiety. He took her hand.

"There will be no wedding, Jennie; we have lost our bride." And the strong man broke down, and ended his troubles in an illness of many weeks, where the events that had caused it pursued him as phantoms of horror in every grotesque variety.

Beautiful amongst many beauties reigned Lady Belmont—but her treachery was avenged; for the man she married possessed neither principle nor tenderness, and soon wearied of her. Archie, some years later, married Rose Lee, the pretty younger sister of Major Dale's bride, Kate; and the episode of the fair widow's visit to Lovell Park is never alluded to by the family of the man she injured.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.



ODE TO MORNING.

YOUTH of the day, delightful morn !

Thy early beams displayed,
On balmy wings of Zephyrs borne,
With blushing light the world adorn
And spread o'er hill and glade.

Before thy beams the clouds retire,
The glittering stars decay ;
Thy glorious light, thy radiant fire
With life the slumbering world inspire
And drive the dews away.

For thee, combined, the feathered race
A general chorus sings,
To hail thy bright, refulgent face,
While, floating through the ethereal space,
Th' echoing music rings.

At thy return the tulip's bloom
A vivid splendour shows ;
The balmy breezes shed perfume,
The fields their wonted charm assume,
And varying sweets disclose.

The leaves that sip the silver dew,
The buds and blooming flowers
Once more their heavenly tints renew ;
Once more, fresh opening to our view,
Shake off the pearly showers.

Oh, hear the lark ! In time be wise,
And bless the new-born day
Ye heedless mortals, hear and rise,
While morning paints the eastern skies,
And rules with mildest sway.

M. F. W.



"The balmy breezes shed perfume,
The fields their wonted charm assume,
And varying sweets disclose."



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A SPIRITUALISTIC PHOTOGRAPHER

I HAD sold out of the army, and being decidedly invalided after a ten years' sojourn in India and the Mauritius, my doctor, immediately after my return to England, ordered me to Bath for a course of the waters. One morning, a few weeks after my arrival, to my great delight and astonishment, I knocked up against the Colonel of my former regiment—a fine soldierly man, some twenty years my senior, but with whom I had always been on terms of intimacy. After a brief chat, he asked me where I was staying, and then invited me to take luncheon with him at the York Hotel. This I gladly accepted; and, the meal over, we settled down comfortably to our cigars (at least I did; for the Colonel I cannot say quite so much). He seemed, after the first excitement of our meeting was over, to have grown restless and pre-occupied; so much so, in fact, that at length, presuming upon my old freedom, I banteringly asked if anything were the matter.

He replied to my question Dutch fashion by asking another.

"Do you ever go in for spiritualism now? You took such an interest in it formerly."

"No," I replied. "I gave it up a long time ago."

"Then you were not convinced by what you had seen and heard?"

"I really don't quite know," was my rejoinder. "That there is a great deal of humbug and deception about it I am thoroughly convinced; and, at the same time, that there is much that cannot be explained is almost equally certain; but where the *unreal* leaves off and the *real* begins is more than I can hazard an opinion upon. What do you think, Colonel?"

"I don't know either," he replied, thoughtfully. "Perhaps you have heard of Professor X——?" (giving the name of one of the greatest advocates of the doctrine of the day. I am writing of some ten years ago, remember).

I nodded assent.

"Well, he is here. I have doubts and beliefs, as you say you have, but I have been thinking the matter over a great deal lately, and have resolved to put them to the test once and for all to-day. I have made an appointment with him for four o'clock. Will you come also?"

"What are his terms?" I began cautiously.

"Five guineas a sitting."

"Wheugh! quite enough to raise or settle one's doubts for ever. However, as mine want arranging one way or the other, I'll come."

Accordingly, a few minutes before the appointed time, we left the

hotel, and proceeded to the house, or rather the rooms (he was only making Bath a halting place) of the Professor. The Colonel sent up his card and we were immediately ushered into a semi-darkened room containing only a few chairs, a camera, and the artist himself. He advanced to meet us as we entered the room, bowed, and then looked inquiringly at me.

"Captain Farquharson, a friend of mine," began the Colonel.

"Also a believer?"

"Partially so," I here put in hastily. "At least, I have doubts which I am waiting for you to dispel."

He bowed again, and then motioning the Colonel into a chair placed in front of the camera, continued gravely:

"Whether your doubts will be aroused or dispelled is more than I can say—so much depends upon yourselves in a matter like this; for just as my camera is dependent upon the assistance of the sun, so am I only an instrument in your hands. However, if you give me, and the subject upon which I am engaged, your undivided attention for the space of a few minutes, the end cannot help but be a successful one."

He spoke earnestly and with the quiet force of a man who believes perfectly in the truth of the words he utters. "Now, gentlemen," he continued, "I want you to concentrate your whole powers of thought upon the person you wish depicted. I need scarcely tell you that it must be upon one who has already joined the land of spirits. I am, as I said once before, only an instrument in your hands, and upon *your* powers of will rests entirely the failure or success of the whole undertaking. Are you ready?"

"I am ready." Something in the tone of the Colonel's voice made me look up and regard him attentively. Yes, there was no doubt about his being ready. He was leaning forward a little in his chair, his right hand supporting his forehead, the eyes slightly downcast, while every muscle in his body seemed rigid and immovable. A wonderful will-power this man possessed; and yet with it all, he was tender and merciful as a woman. No wonder that he had gained the entire trust and confidence of the men under his command, while amongst women he was simply idolised; and yet he had never married. Once or twice, with the rashness of youth, I had felt tempted to chaff him upon the subject, but something, I cannot quite explain what, had held me back; and so the question of his celibacy was still unasked.

The sharp click of the cap being placed upon the camera, and a heavy, long-drawn sigh from the Colonel, brought me back again to the present. He had risen from his chair, and stood now, drawn up to his full height, in the middle of the room. His face was still set, although the muscles were slowly relaxing, but the eyes had a strange far-away look in them that was almost painful to see. He shivered slightly, and seemed quite oblivious of my presence as he turned and walked slowly towards the chair which I had just vacated.

At this moment the Professor returned from his inner sanctum, and, glancing across at me, said: "Your turn now, sir."

An uncanny sort of feeling seemed to come over me, and I could not help wishing that I had let the entire thing alone. But I could not now draw back with credit to myself or my profession either; so I took the empty chair with the air and resignation of a martyr, devoutly hoping that my face gave no indication of the tumult raging within.

"Are you ready, sir?"

"Quite ready," and, with the words, I tried to give myself up thoroughly to the undertaking, keeping my mind fixed upon a brother who had died some years previously in Canada, and of whom (to the regret of us all, but more especially of my mother, whose youngest son he was) we had no portrait. The next few seconds I cannot clearly describe. To say that I felt hot and cold by turns, and that every vein in my body seemed at bursting point, is nothing compared with the uncomfortable sensations that seemed to possess me. It was really horrible, and I had to use my utmost force of control to keep myself from groaning aloud. Suddenly the welcome click of the cap told me I might be "off guard once more," and beating a somewhat hasty and un-soldier-like retreat from my present position, am not ashamed to confess that I felt quite glad to see the face of my old friend the Colonel again. He seemed to have quite recovered from the effects of his sitting, as, with a friendly nod, he pushed forward a chair for my use.

"I don't quite like it," I began—but at this moment I was interrupted by the return of the Professor, who, holding a negative in his hand, advanced towards the middle of the room. He held it to the light for a second or two, and then, gently passing his hand over it, addressed the Colonel.

"You are quite sure of the person you wished depicted?"

"Quite sure," came the decided answer.

"Then is this the one you thought of?"

The Colonel took the photograph from his hand deliberately, but after one glance at it, his nerves seemed to have deserted him altogether. The old dazed look had come back into his eyes and the colour fled from cheek and lip as he sank into a chair, muttering hoarsely:

"Merciful Heaven, it is she—it is she!"

That the shock was a great one there could be no doubt of, but as he still held the photograph in front of him I could not advance to render any assistance, not knowing but that the affair might be one he would prefer keeping to himself. I did therefore the next best, and, in short, the only thing I could do under the circumstances by trying to recall him to the present.

"You are ill, Colonel. Can I do anything for you?"

He turned and looked at me as I spoke but gave no heed to the

question. However, the expression on his face was neither a startled nor unhappy one, and it could not have been a fancy that the mouth had a softer and tenderer look upon it than usual.

At this moment the Professor returned and, placing the second negative in my hand, whispered as he nodded in the Colonel's direction :

"No failure *there*, I fancy."

The next moment he might have looked and said the same of me, had I had eyes to see or ears to hear with, for standing out boldly from the negative was an exact counterpart of myself, every nerve stretched to its utmost tension and with the wearied and troubled expression that had been only too true an index of the feelings I had experienced in that chair of painful memories. While standing behind me, a little to the right and slightly leaning in my direction, was a perfect likeness of my brother as I had last seen him prior to his departure for America. Not that this second figure was as distinct and clearly defined as my own—it seemed rather as though a fine and almost imperceptible gauze had been drawn over it; and yet there the figure stood; as easily recognisable to my eyes as it was to those of my mother—to whom, at a later period, and without giving any previous account of the story I am now relating, I showed it. I was so entirely taken up with the surprise and mystification of my own thoughts as to have forgotten the Colonel altogether until a hand on my shoulder and a voice in my ear recalled me to the present.

"Farquharson, you came here with me against your will, and so it is but fair that I reward you with a sight of the photograph which upset me so much."

As he placed the negative in my hand, I started back in astonishment, for there sat the Colonel as I have before described him, while bending over, and with the action of one who has a pleasant secret to whisper, was the lithe, graceful figure of a *coloured* woman (*girl*, I ought rather to say, for she could not have counted more than sixteen or seventeen years at the utmost), and a beautiful woman too; with delicate, sensitive nostrils, and happy, smiling lips; but these counted as nothing beside the wonderful depths of the dreamy eyes from which a soul of rare purity and unbounded faith seemed still to be looking out.

"But, Colonel," I began, when surprise would allow me to speak: "this is a *coloured* woman!"

"Yes," he replied, gravely; "she belonged to a little story in my life, and was very dear to me indeed."

And so this accounted for the Colonel's celibacy.

I have my brother's photograph by me now—at my mother's death it was returned to me, for she could never be persuaded to part with it during her lifetime.

And doubtless the Colonel has his also.

IN THE PRIMROSE TIME.

A COPPICE in a sheltered nook of the hill-side. On the high downs above the bare trees were bowing before the strong March wind, while the chalky roads were sending up the ransoms of many kings in white blinding clouds of March dust; but down in the sunshiny shelter below, the chestnuts put forth their tiny green fans, the pussy-willows along the bed of the stream opened their silvery catkins, and pale primroses lifted up their starry faces from the brown drift of last year's fallen leaves.

A girl sat singing to herself at the foot of a tree, her lap heaped with primroses, which she was tying up as she sang, only stopping now and then to lift her face to the sky, where the lark, a mile aloft, was sending down a rain of melody. Then her voice, clear and strong, went shrilling higher and higher as if in challenge, breaking off, now into a brilliant roulade, now into a little school song.

She looked like a primrose herself, as she sat amongst the brown leaves with her delicate pale face, her starry eyes and hair of palest gold. She was poorly dressed, but a subtle refinement pervaded her voice and movements. "Cuckoo, cuckoo!" came in a jubilant note from the tree-tops. "Cuckoo!" she sang merrily in response, and "Cuckoo, cuckoo, spring-time is come," sang a chorus of children's voices, and a little procession wound its way in and out between the brown tree trunks; all tiny children led by Baby Nell, holding up a scrap of a blue skirt full of marsh marigolds. All the rest carried primroses in their sunburnt little paws.

"See, Nansie, all these! Won't the ladies be pleased! This will fill the basket when we've brought the moss."

"May we go and get the palms now? The boys must do the cutting, mustn't they?"

"We won't spoil the bushes. I'll hold Baby Nell fast all the time we're near the brook!"

They all spoke at once, clustering round Nansie, who answered them not so much by words as by smiles and indistinct murmurs. The babies always understood Nansie and were good with her. It was the grown folk who shook their heads and said she would never be anything but a poor innocent, or pointed meaningly to their foreheads when anyone asked questions about the silent, pale little lass.

She had been a docile, sweet-tempered child, never rude or violent, terrified by other children, and never able to understand or take part in either lessons or games. She would sit alone contentedly in the sunshine talking in her own language to the birds and flowers, and singing to herself while her quick fingers plaited endless lengths of straw-plait—the staple industry of the village—for her mother. Now

and then she would have strange fits of restlessness, roving away for the whole day, coming home at night weary, foot-sore, and hungry. It was impossible either to follow or to restrain her. Nor did she ever come to harm, till one stormy day when young Philip Reinholt, riding home across the downs, found the child miles away from the village, huddled up insensible under a furze bush. He thought at first she had been struck by lightning, but she was only panic-smitten, and he was able to carry her home before him on his horse.

The fright and exposure brought on an illness, after which those about her noticed a change in Nansie. She grew more awake to things around her; she recognised people; she remembered what was told her; but above all she became possessed of a spirit of dog-like attachment to Philip Reinholt. It was not shown obtrusively; in fact, he was never aware of it. She would wait for hours in the lanes round the Manor House to see him go out or in, insisted on being taken to church with her mother, so that she could watch him in his place beside his old father in the Manor House pew; and treasured up a glove that he had dropped one day, putting it under her pillow every night. Philip came to inquire after her during her illness, and when her mother complained of her trick of roaming, spoke sternly to her and forbade her to do so more. She trembled, but looked him steadily in the face, promised, and kept her word.

But a great change was coming for Nansie. The old Vicar died, and the new one came. He was a devoted parish priest, which did not concern Nansie; he was a musical genius, which did.

Sitting on his low vicarage wall one day, thinking with downcast brow of the three plain, voiceless, tuneless daughters with which it had pleased Providence to afflict him, he was aware of a party of children in the field beyond practising the Harvest Thanksgiving hymns. Suddenly a voice joined in which made him start and listen, and smite his hands together with a mighty ejaculation, and then run to his garden-gate to see from what nightingale's throat came such wondrous music.

And behold it was Nansie. Off to her parents he set in hot haste. Did they guess what a treasure they had in their keeping—this marvellous song-bird, every note of whose voice in the days to come should be worth golden guineas? She must be doubly watched and cherished. The organist must train her voice under his—the Vicar's—anxious superintendence.

The parents, simple village folk, took it all calmly. They could not love her more than they did, their only one. They had always given her of their best. They were much obliged to the Vicar, and that was all.

Down came a celebrated London physician at the Vicar's instance, who examined the child, questioned her parents, spoke oracular words of encouragement, and departed, leaving instructions for the training of her deft fingers, and for the lessons and exercises to be

used to develop her dormant faculties. They gave her the infants' class in the village school to mind. She "had a way with the children." Then she led the little wavering band of feeble trebles in the church choir. People were beginning to forget that they had once called her "poor Nansie," and spoke with respect of the wonderful art embroideries that she was working with the young ladies at the vicarage.

Such was Nansie's history up to the day when she sat at the foot of the beech-tree and sang to the sky-lark. A slim young lass of sixteen, with dainty "lady ways," on which her mother secretly prided herself; and few remaining traces of her former state beyond a certain slowness of speech and thought with all but the children, and an abstracted look in the pretty blue eyes, as if they dwelt on something past the ken of ordinary beings; and a way of holding herself aloof, that was, after all, but a pretty trick of maidenly reserve.

She had finished her posies long before the children returned, and began to pick the leaves and grasses about her, examining and comparing them, and giving them names out of her own fancy when her knowledge failed.

She plucked at a trail of ground-ivy that had begun to put forth its fresh green. It came up in a beautiful branching spray, uncovering a small arched opening under a root of the tree, and as she broke it off something jerked up into the sunshine, bright and shining, and fell into the heart of a primrose cluster. She put aside the green leaves and faint yellow buds, and there it lay—a massive gold ring with a shield-shaped green stone.

She knew it directly. Those were the Reynholt arms engraved on the stone. She had seen it on Philip's finger many a time. She held it smiling to herself, then drew a ribbon from her neck and slipped the ring on beside a medal that someone had given her. Then she lined the great brown basket with soft, green, feathery moss and filled it with her posies, wreathing the edge with ivy-sprays.

In picking them she uncovered the hole in the tree yet more, and peering in, saw something white lying on the moss. "He must have put it there. The ring must have dropped as he drew his hand back. What is it? Who is it for? It is a letter? No! There is no writing outside, though it is sealed. I may look at it."

She opened it confidently. She knew how a letter should begin and end, but this did neither, she thought. It was not signed, and began without preliminary.

"Let this be our farewell, Mona. These are the last words I shall speak to you as your lover—even Sir Francis may pardon them. I will never, of my own free will, look on your fair false face again. I try to put from my thoughts the touch of your white hand, the sound of your sweet voice. What are they now to me? They belong to Sir Francis March.

"You tell me he is devoured by pride and jealous mistrust. He is the husband you have chosen. You say you have no friend left but me. Friend! I am no friend of yours. I am your lover or nothing.

"So, of your pity, I beseech you to leave us. Had I my freedom, I would gladly put the wide world's space between us, but you know I am bound, tied hand and foot by my duty to my father, while you stay here against your husband's wish, just of your own choice.

"Therefore, Go! Though it breaks my heart to say so—my love, my queen.

"For me all is lost, *fors l'honneur!*"

Nansie put it down and looked about bewildered. She had spelled so far painfully and carefully without much sense of the words reaching her. It did not much matter that she left the rest unread. It was a very boyish effusion to the last, exaggerated in its phrasing but honest in its exaggeration. And Philip was the writer. That dawned on her at last. Then she crushed it vehemently in her hands and dropped her head forward on her knees, struggling with an actual physical spasm of pain that pierced her through and through.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo!" sang the bird overhead, and "Cuckoo, cuckoo! bring us good luck," sang the children in answer.

Nansie picked up her hat and russet cloak and went to meet them, carrying the basket. The boys had fine store of "palms" to bear in church to-morrow, the girls scampered on ahead to unlock the gate to the road. Nansie overtook them just as a carriage with a handsome pair of ponies drew up with a cloud of dust.

"Bring those primroses to me, and let me see them," cried the lady who was driving.

Nansie's face grew set and dour, and she advanced unwillingly.

Yet to anyone but Nansie the lady would have been fair to look upon. A brilliant dark beauty with a rich bloom on her cheek, soft dark eyes under heavy lashes, and red, smiling lips.

"I will buy them. Here, put them in the carriage."

"No. You cannot have them. They are for the church," said Nansie with scant civility.

"Nonsense! You can get plenty more; here's half-a-crown."

"No. I will not give them to you." She turned away abruptly, drawing away Baby Nell, whom the lady had bent forward to notice. She was a hot-tempered lady, unused to opposition.

"Simpleton!" she said angrily, her black brows frowning. "Oh, I forgot. The village idiot. You ought to be shut up. Out of the way, children!" and she made her ponies start and dash forward with the sharp cut she gave them.

"Doesn't oo like that pretty lady?" demanded Baby Nell.

"She is Lady March; I hate her," Nansie answered to herself. Then they crossed the road and climbed the stile into the field-path to the parish church.

They were received with subdued acclamation in the porch.

Easter was early this year and spring was late, and till now primroses had seemed unattainable. Some dozen workers were doing their best with scant materials, assisted by the Vicar and Curate, and some workmen who had dropped in at their dinner-hour. Nansie's posies must go to the east window, they all agreed, and she carried them up to the workers in the chancel.

"Where did you find so many?" someone asked.

"In Redwoods, down by the stream," she replied.

"Redwoods! They are not open!" spoke Philip Reinholt sharply, looking round from the pillar to which he was fastening a garland. He was a handsome, bright-faced young fellow, with kindly blue eyes and a yellow moustache. He looked disturbed, and spoke louder than he intended.

"The General let us in himself when he heard we were gathering for the church."

"Oh, if my father allowed it, all right."

"Hush, if you please," said the Vicar. "Send the little ones home, Nansie, and as I think most of our choir are here, we can go over the hymns for to-morrow."

Baby Nell and her brother pattered hand in hand down the aisle, the Curate seated himself at the organ, and the singers took their places. Philip refused to join them, and took his place moodily on the base of a pillar out of sight. What had *he* to do with "Easter triumph, Easter joy?" He, still in the strain and stress of the conflict, fighting miserably, despairingly, conscious that whichever way the victory went it meant loss and woe unutterable to him. Nansie's voice used to charm him once with its clear, cold purity of tone, but to-day it moved and distressed him. It sounded richer, fuller, more human, with a touch of passion that stirred some answering chord within him.

He stole silently away, leaving the Easter hymn unfinished.

Nansie sat at her window late into the night watching the fleecy clouds scud before the wind across the starless sky. She had read and re-read the letter till she knew it by heart, and deeper and deeper the meaning sank into her mind. Then she stole softly downstairs into the living room, where the embers on the hearth still glowed, and kindling them with her breath into a flame, burned the letter to ashes. A spirit of unrest had seized the girl; she felt it driving her forth as in her childish days. The trees seemed to beckon and the voice of the wind to call. She wrapped herself in hood and cloak, and opening the door noiselessly, sped out into the night.

Fast and far she walked, till, returning homeward, she found herself in Broadmeads, within sight of the house that Sir Francis March had taken for the winter season. *Now* she knew what she was going for, and across the park she hurried, and plunged into a woodland track

that would lead her direct to Redwoods and the primrose dell. Straight as the crow flies, through brake and briar, she made her way till she stood at the foot of the tall beech tree. In the cavity at its roots lay another letter.

A tiny, fancifully-folded, tinted and scented note. She took it with a shiver of excitement, hid it in her dress, and made for home.

It was clutched in her hand when she woke next morning after a few brief hours of sleep, and she anxiously strained her wits to decipher it. It was not possible for her to have entirely understood it, or fathomed the depths of heartless folly to which inordinate vanity can drive a woman of Lady March's type. She had jilted Philip Reinholt coolly and calculatingly for her wealthy old admirer, yet she grudged the loss of a lover. It was easy to guess what her reply to poor Phil's appeal would have been had she received it. As it was, she was evidently indignant at his not meeting her, or writing, and she wrote with just enough acerbity to pique and just enough tender sweetness to entice him into further folly. She ended by imperatively demanding that he should meet her there, at 7 o'clock on Sunday evening—and she put it so that it would have been difficult to refuse.

Nansie's eyes were angry as she hid it away before her mother came to call her.

She went through the usual routine—Sunday school—the lengthy Easter Day service—dinner—and Sunday school again, in her old mechanical fashion. Her mother had made her a white dress for the day; and as she coiled up Nansie's yellow hair and pinned a cluster of primroses at her throat, she secretly rejoiced at her daughter's fairness and the contrast she made to the bouncing, blooming village girls with their over-smart dress and hoyden manners, or the prim, dowdy young ladies from the vicarage. "She is like a lily amongst them," thought the good woman.

She did her part in the singing carefully and well, but the music sounded lifeless and tuneless to her, and Philip's ring weighed on her breast like a circlet of red-hot iron. She could see the Broadmeads pew, where Sir Francis sat huddled up in a great fur coat, his sharp, spiteful eyes ever on the watch, and Lady March, beautiful and devout, kept her long lashes bent steadfastly on her book, except for one brief expressive second when they flashed forth a signal to the seat in the chancel where Philip sat beside his old father. Nansie saw it all. She was becoming painfully alive to the hints and suggestions that were floating in the air about her. Self-consciousness was dawning in the girl. She began to wonder at herself—at this Nansie, her whole soul in a tumult of wrath and agony of suspense—and at the other Nansie who curtsied to the Vicar and stood up with the little ones to say her catechism and forgot half of it.

Would the day ever be done and the clock strike seven? She was bound to go to church, and meanwhile what might be happening?

She was in her place listening vacantly to the organist's last whispered injunctions when the first stroke of the hour sounded. Another, and the last comers of the congregation hurried in and the organist struck the first chord of the voluntary. Another, and a footfall she knew amongst a thousand caught her ear, and Philip passed her leading the old General to his place.

"Did you ever hear anything more magnificent than the hymn to-night?" asked the Vicar, excitedly, of his family. "It was simply thrilling. How the girl sings! She *must* have some glimmering of the sense of it all, poor creature."

"Perhaps she felt excited and triumphant about something on her own account," said the eldest and most matter-of-fact daughter.

"There will be a letter in the beech tree to-night," thought Nansie, and escaped to see. She was right. There it lay. A mere scrap written on a leaf of a note-book with a *châtelaine* pencil. A scribbled reproach, half-tender, half-imperious: She would await his explanations.

Nansie watched and waited.

No meeting took place, she was sure, during the next few days. The old General was ill, and his son never left his bedside.

Another note came to the beech tree a day or two later. "Had he waited for her in vain? Sir Francis had kept her prisoner in a fit of mad jealousy. *Why* did he not even write to her? Was he afraid of compromising her? She would risk that and more for a word of sympathy. Ever his Mona."

Nansie hid it safely with the rest.

Another followed—angry and questioning. "Was he watched as well as herself? His father, she knew, hated her, but was he a man to bear it? Why did he not defy them all, and come openly to her house? Sir Francis could not shut the door against a neighbour. She would be at home at a given hour every day for a week."

This was the last. Nansie waited for more, but none came.

Then she began to ponder about what she was to do with her plunder. She had some dim floating notions about the rights of ownership. Had they been addressed to Philip she would have given them to him at once, but they were not; they did not even commence with his name. Then they must belong to "Mona." Well, she should have them—"some day." Nansie would keep them safe for her. She had a desk, a school-prize for needlework, with a plentiful supply of unused stationery. She took a sheet of paper and enclosed the letters, and then with much solemnity lit a candle and sealed the parcel with Philip's ring. "I will carry this always with me till I meet her, and then I will throw it at her feet and tell her he has never read a line of them." A silly fancy, but it pleased her.

"They say the poor old Squire's going fast," her father said at dinner a day or two later. "I met Mr. Philip fetching the London doctor from the station. Eh, but he looks bad. Ten years older with trouble."

"Ah, well. It's what we must all come to," said the good dame, cheerfully, beginning to clear the table.

Neither of them thought of Nansie. She had never appeared to listen to what passed before her unless directly addressed, and not always to understand then. Now, though she sat with eyes cast down, her ears were alert to catch every word, and the whole strength of her mind bent upon understanding it. She slipped away to think. From her window she could see the Manor House, where the Squire lay dying and Philip watched in lonely sadness. An irresistible impulse seemed to draw her there. She looked at her pretty white gown hanging on its peg, but some delicate instinct made her keep to the faded old frock and russet cloak, childishly short and scant as they were.

Her old wanderings had taught her every path and short cut to the Manor. She had haunted the place at all times and seasons too often not to know exactly how near she could approach unseen almost to the very windows. Then a sudden dash across the open and she was safe in the shelter of the portico.

She tried the door softly. It was on the latch, and, opening it, she slid into the hall like a shadow. Plenty of hiding-places there. A high-backed carved settle stood on one side the hearth, and behind this she could kneel, watching her chance to see or hear of Philip.

Suddenly the door-bell clanged loudly and impatiently. She heard the servant's footsteps crossing the hall, and then a voice that she knew.

"I wish to see Mr. Reynholt at once."

"Beg your pardon, my lady, but Mr. Reynholt is with the General, and the doctor's orders are that they are not to be disturbed."

"Then I shall come in and wait till you can take my message."

The man made a feeble murmured protest, but unavailing, and Lady March swept past him regardless. "Tell him I am here. Tell him to come as soon as he can. I will wait till I see or hear from him."

"The doctor's orders—" again protested the butler.

"I shall not go without an answer to my message." Lady March's voice was raised high with impatience, and the man made the best of the situation by showing her hurriedly into the library and shutting the door on her.

Nansie heard the rustle of a dress on the staircase and the voice of a housekeeper or nurse speaking low but imperatively.

"What's the meaning of this disturbance? Have you forgotten your orders, Parkins?"

"I couldn't help it, Mrs. Peterson. It's Lady March—won't go without seeing Mr. Reynholt. It's on important business."

"Nothing is of such importance as peace and quietness just now. You may tell her that. The doctor says nobody is to go near the room. Everything depends on this sleep lasting."

"It won't be the slightest good telling her so," predicted the butler despondently.

"Then say you have given the message to me. I shall know how to dispose of her." Mrs. Peterson marched determinedly away. The butler looked doubtfully at the library door, and finally departed to his own quarters, letting events slide.

Nansie listened and thought awhile. "She must go," she decided. "If he daren't tell her so, I will. She shan't stay here." Then she boldly crossed the hall and flung the door open.

Lady March sat at the writing-table, her chin resting on her clasped hands. She looked handsomer than ever, Nansie thought, her cheeks were so red and her eyes shone so: When she beheld Nansie, they opened wider than ever with anger and contempt.

"What are you doing here? Who gave you leave to come and prowl about the house?" she asked wrathfully.

Nansie advanced quite steadily. "I have come on an errand. The man dared not tell you. You are to go."

"What!" She sprang to her feet, her brow thunder, her eyes lightning. "What do you say?"

"You are to go," repeated Nansie still more emphatically. "Mr. Reynholt wants you to go."

"He dares send me such a message—and by you—the idiot. And you dared to repeat it!"

With a sweeping rush she was on Nansie, and had seized her by the shoulder fiercely, her wrathful eyes flashing, her cheek crimson, her voice choking with rage. Nansie shook like a reed in her furious grasp, and her face blanched with terror, but a wild, savage sense of power rose in her heart. She—*She*, "Poor Nansie," could make this great lady mad with rage! She could never sneer at her for a "harmless idiot" again. They were enemies, and so equals.

"Let me alone; I have something for you," she managed to gasp.

The grasp on her shoulder was loosened, and Lady March almost flung her from her.

"Give it me quickly, you fool."

Nansie brought forth her packet. It was snatched out of her hand. Lady March's eyes grew suddenly soft, and a complacent smile dawned on her lips. She examined the seal. "If you had dared to break it," she muttered, threateningly. Then turning her back contemptuously on the girl, she broke open the packet. Her own letters fell to the ground at her feet.

Nansie caught the reflection of her face in the mirror above, and before she could turn, had opened the door and fled softly away.

Next week Sir Francis and Lady March left Broadmeads for the Continent.

It all happened long ago. Who can tell where a story really ends? To my mind it seems to go on for ever. Nansie laughs and says

hers is only just beginning. She is a beautiful woman now, with a lovely voice, and a name well-known all round the world. She has had a brilliant career, with enough incident in it to set up a score of romance writers in trade, and has refused foreign coronets of all sorts and sizes, native money-bags, a prosperous impressario, and a millionaire from across the water. And yet she was pleased to tell me that she considers her life a blank up to a given date last year, when a certain handsome young artist asked permission to paint her portrait.

She is as good as she is gifted, and he is worthy of her. May they be happy. But how about Philip Reynholt?

"Oh," says Nansie, "I saw him last night at the State Concert, with his beautiful American bride. Till she appeared, Lady March had been the handsomest woman in the room. Was it not strange they did not appear to know one another? And"—with a wistful look and a smile that was half a sigh—"neither had the slightest recollection of me."

"So much the better for everyone," said I.



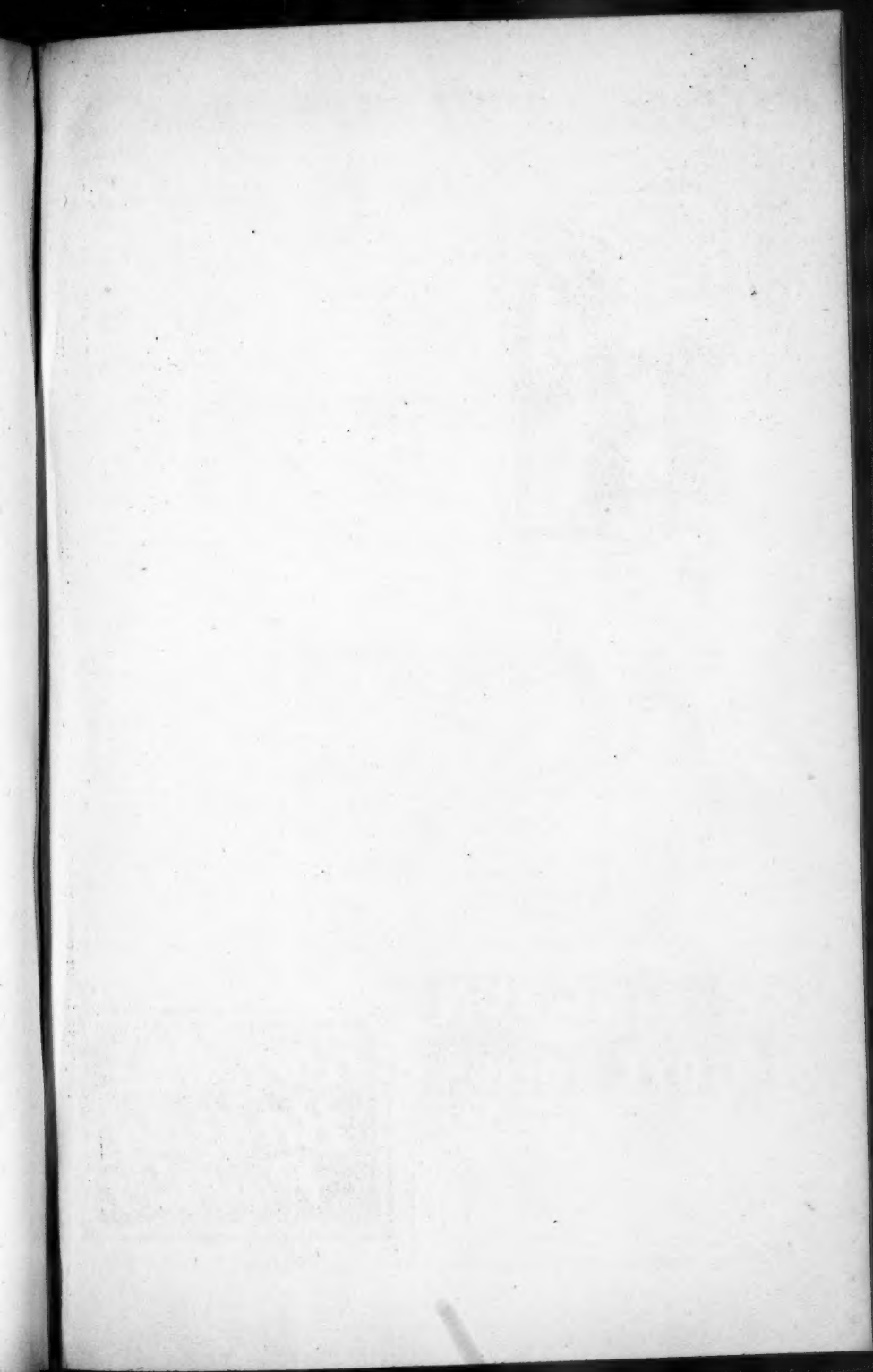
SNOW IN APRIL.

O FOOLISH bud, to blow
 At first faint smile of Spring,
 Perfuming all the air!
 O foolish bird, to sing,
 And build a nest that all may spy;
 Your young of cold and want will die
 Beneath the branches bare.

How sad and silent now
 The tuneful April grove!
 Its colour, melody and love
 All lost beneath the snow;
 The fair and flowery April grove,
 With all its birds in pair.

O foolish heart, beware!
 Nor, unforeseeing,
 (Lured by a yearned-for bliss—
 A smile, a kiss),
 Barter sweet hopes of youth and youth's well-being,
 To build and blossom in a leafless bower,
 With April bird and flower,
 Lest Love take wing amid the falling snows—
 Oh, wait for summer shade and perfumed rose!

C. M. GEMMER.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

"THEY ARE MY NIECES," RETURNED AUNT COPP.

"MISS HALIWEIL AND MISS LUCY HALIWEIL."

R. TAYLOR.

R. TAYLOR.